

**SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY****PARLIAMENTARY
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THE CABINET

(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
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Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
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Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 17 of 2021

Sitting of Saturday 19 June 2021

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11.30 a.m.

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table.

(a) **Prime Minister's Office**

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity

The Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Supplementary Appropriation (2020-2021) (No. 2) Bill 2021 (No XI of 2021). (In Original)

(b) **Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade

The Light Rail Fares and Light Rail Tickets (Amendment) Regulations 2021. (Government Notice No. 132 of 2021)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MOGAS - ALLEGED ADULTERATED

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the independent investigation instituted into alleged adulterated Mogas in October and November 2019, he will state –

- (a) the name of the Consultant and the quantum of fees paid to him;
- (b) the dates the tests were effected and table the test results, including those carried out on the shipments of Hafnia Libra and STI Executive;
- (c) if the specifications agreed with Vitol Bahrain E.C. are identical to the original tender specifications;
- (d) the date when Vitol Bahrain E.C. was requested to limit manganese content in Mogas to a maximum of 2 mg per litre, and
- (e) the outcome of the meeting between the then Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection and Vitol Bahrain E.C. in France in December 2019.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the responsibility of procuring the annual requirements of petroleum products for Mauritius rests with the State Trading Corporation since 1984. Initially, the STC had recourse to selective bidding and later, as from 1987, it resorted to open international tenders for such procurement and the contracts were awarded to the most competitive bidder.

Since then, it has been the practice for the supplier of the petroleum products to appoint an independent accredited surveyor to conduct tests on the products at the port of loading prior to the loading on the vessel. At the discharge port, only the volume of the products was verified by a surveyor appointed by the STC. With respect to the quality, the STC relied on the certificate of quality issued after testing at the port of loading.

From 1987 to 2006, the suppliers of the STC were Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Caltex Petroleum Corporation, Engen, Shell International Ltd, Independent Petroleum Group (IPG), KPC, Veba Oil, Galana Energy Ltd, Chevron Texaco Global Trading, Addax B.V, Vitol Bahrain E.C, and Litasco.

In 2006, following bilateral negotiations between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of India, STC has been purchasing petroleum products from Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL). The STC entered into a first contract with

MRPL in July 2006 for a period of one year only to assess the performance of the supplier. Thereafter, the contract was renewed for successive 3-year periods from August 2007 to July 2010, August 2010 to July 2013, August 2013 to July 2016 and August 2016 to July 2019.

In 2016, the STC decided to carry out surveys on the world market to determine the prevailing premiums for petroleum products required by Mauritius. As more competitive rates were obtainable, the STC held negotiations with the MRPL for a decrease in its premium. However, MRPL did not agree. The STC then decided to review its procurement process and launch tenders on the international market.

Vitol Bahrain E.C. was subsequently awarded the contract for the supply of clean petroleum products as from 01 August 2019. In November 2019, the Motor Vehicles Dealers Association made representations to the effect that Mogas supplied by Vitol Bahrain E.C. was not according to the agreed specifications and that certain vehicles were having technical problems, as a result of which an internal enquiry started and the STC started using the samples taken on the consignment from the MT Hafnia Libra, which reached Mauritius on 23 October 2019, for testing by SGS (Mauritius), the appointed surveyor of the STC and also by SGS (France). The reports received from SGS (France) on the sample from the MT Hafnia Libra revealed that –

- (i) the Research Octane Number, which is supposed to be a minimum of 95.0, was only 94.7;
- (ii) the existent gum, which is supposed to be a minimum of 4.0 milligram per 100 millilitre, was 6.0 milligram per 100 millilitre, and
- (iii) the potential gum, which was supposed to be a maximum of 4.0 milligram per 100 millilitre, was 18 milligram per millilitre.

Samples were also taken from the consignment of the STI Executive which reached Mauritius on 12 November 2019. The tests revealed –

- (i) the existing gum, which was supposed to be a minimum of 4.0 milligram per 100 millilitre, was 13.0 milligram per 100 millilitre, and
- (ii) the potential gum, which was supposed to be a maximum of 4.0 milligram per 100 millilitre, was actually 12 milligram per millilitre.

Both reports mentioned the presence of manganese in the fuel supply.

I am tabling, as requested, a copy of the tests results for the two shipments.

In view of the discrepancies noted, it was decided that further tests should be carried out and additional samples were taken from filling stations. On 30 November 2019, Vitol Bahrain E.C., in consultation with the STC, appointed Minton Treharne & Davies Ltd as an independent Consultant to investigate reported concerns regarding the presence of manganese in the two cargoes of Mogas supplied to Mauritius by Hafnia Libra and the STI Executive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the cost of the investigation carried out by Minton Treharne & Davies Ltd were borne by Vitol...

Mr X. L. Duval: Shame!

Mr Callichurn: ...Bahrain E.C. itself.

Mr X. L. Duval: Shame!

Mr Callichurn:...and the information is not available to STC. As regards part ...

(Interruptions)

Can I continue? As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by STC that specifications agreed with Vitol Bahrain E.C. are identical to these specifications used for Mangalore as from 2016. The Mogas supplied by Vitol Bahrain E.C. was, therefore, conform to the specifications.

Concerning part (d) of the question, when the reports confirmed the presence of manganese in the consignment of the Hafnia Libra, discussions were carried out with Vitol Bahrain E.C. and they were requested to make sure that for the next consignment, that is, for Analipsi Lady, the fuel supplied should be manganese-free.

I am further informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that on 12 December 2019, a delegation led by the then Minister of Commerce went to France to discuss with Vitol Bahrain E.C. on the question of presence of manganese in the two consignments of Hafnia Libra and STI Executive.

The outcome of the meeting in France revealed that -

- (i) the direct relationship between the level of manganese present in the consignments of the Hafnia Libra and STI Executive and the technical problems faced by car owners had not yet been established beyond reasonable doubt;

- (ii) notwithstanding the level of manganese, the two consignments were fully compliant with the specifications for that contract;
- (iii) a report of the Motor Vehicles Dealers Association as to the number of cars concerned and the quantum of compensation was excessively high, and
- (iv) there was need for further tests to be carried out to conclusively establish that the problems faced by the car owners and Motor Vehicles Dealers Association could be attributable to the presence of manganese.

In this respect, the final report of Minton Treharne & Davies Ltd submitted on 24 February 2020, confirmed that although manganese was present in the two consignments from Hafnia Libra and STI Executive, it has not been possible to determine the exact level of manganese present because different parameters used for testing resulted into different levels. The report also concludes that there was insufficient data to attribute the engine damage to manganese solely and that the majority of the vehicle users in Mauritius do not appear to have encountered such engine damage relating to the presence of manganese. Finally, the report mentioned that the problem may alternatively have been that some cars imported with higher specification as from 2013 and onwards were incompatible with the specifications of Mogas. Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I just ask the hon. Minister whether this Vitol is the same Vitol that was, in December 2020, punished with a Rs6.7 billion fine following an FBI investigation in contracts given by Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico for petroleum purchases? Is he aware of that?

Mr Callichurn: No, I am not aware.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will table, Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Minister is not aware. I will table full details for the Minister and the Press about this condemnation following an FBI investigation. I hope we do not get the same FBI investigation in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether the claim would appear to be against Vitol for adulterated Mogas; whether you find it not absolutely ridiculous that it is Vitol itself that appoints the Consultant Minton to check whether it is possible that it has mis-supplied Mauritius? Is that the independent inquiry that the previous Minister promised in this House - and there is Hansard here - following an excellent PNQ by my predecessor? Independent inquiry paid by the person who is at fault? Can I get an answer, please?

Mr Callichurn: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, the firm appointed to carry out the inquiry surely was an independent firm, but the...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You need a reply or not?

Mr X. L. Duval: He is laughing himself...

Mr Callichurn:...the choice was done in consultation with the STC. Listen, we cannot cast doubt on the independence of the...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, public opinion, the FBI, everyone...

Mr Speaker: He has not finished!

Mr X. L. Duval:...will decide whether, in fact, it is normal, when you are trying to sue someone for 3,300 vehicles that have been damaged in Mauritius, that it is that person who is being sued who should appoint the Consultant, so-called Consultant, as mentioned by previous Minister Sawmynaden.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask hon. Minister whether he will tell us, from what SGS France has said, what was the actual level of manganese found in Hafnia Libra and STI Executive consignments.

Mr Callichurn: Well, I have undertaken to table the report. Well, the report says that the level of manganese in Hafnia was 76 mg per litre...

An hon. Member: Instead of?

Mr Speaker: Order here! This is Question Time; your own PNQ. You have to respect your PNQ!

Mr Callichurn: Well, it is contained in that report; you can have a look.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have another question for the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr X. L. Duval: It is okay, he will table it; let him table it.

Mr Speaker: Please, don't be in a rush!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask hon. Minister whether...

Mr Speaker: No, have you finished? Please!

Mr X. L. Duval: I don't...

Mr Speaker: Please! Please!

Mr Callichurn: Well, the question he asked...

Mr Speaker: Please, listen to me! What's wrong? You finished with your reply, Minister?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the question that the hon. Leader of Opposition asked concerning the level of manganese found in the two shipments, I have the report with me and I am tabling same. He can take cognizance of it. So, I won't go in details because there are other specifications as well.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he has taken cognizance of what was, in fact, tabled by his predecessor of the agreed specification between STC and Vitol Bahrain - this was from the House itself - and whether he has taken cognizance of the STC tender which was issued in March 2019, whereas the STC's tender, would you believe, includes a maximum amount of 2 milligrams per litre for manganese - you have just said there is 74. And surprise, surprise, the agreed specifications tabled in this House make no mention at all of manganese and, incorrectly, you have said that Mangalore, there was no mention of manganese, whereas I am tabling also the agreed specifications with Mangalore which says properly "no additive containing manganese should be added". I know you are new at the post, Mr Minister, I am not blaming you at all, but I am just saying that this House deserves frank and clear answers. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is this: is the Minister aware that unproperly refined petrol has manganese added so that it becomes RON95 and it is about 10% cheaper than properly refined petrol, and that would amount to about Rs150 m. saving on that 6 months' contract, notwithstanding the huge damage made to the cars? Do you understand my point, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Callichurn: Yes, I do understand, but I need to give some explanation before. Mr Speaker, Sir, when STC ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Now come on!

Mr Callichurn: ... signed the contract with Mangalore, in that original contract, mention was made in the specifications regarding the level of manganese to be supplied for clean petroleum. Actually, Mr Speaker, Sir, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemical Limited

used to supply Mogas since 2006 on the basis of an agreed contract on which mention was made, like I said, that the level of manganese should be less than 2 milligrams per litre. The arrangements with MRPL lasted until July 2016. However, in 2016, the contract and specifications were slightly altered to remove the reference to the effect that the level of manganese should be less than 2 milligrams per litre. That was in 2016, and it was an omission, I should say, on the part of the officer who prepared that document.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Callichurn: Because I am informed by the STC, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the explanation given for no reference in that specification as regards the level of manganese, is that the requirement was deleted by an officer of the STC, and Mangalore Refinery, despite the alteration made, continued to supply petrol with the level of manganese at less than 2 milligrams per litre.

Mr X. L. Duval: He can go on and on!

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr Callichurn: Then, what happened is...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please! You cannot interrupt the proceedings like this!

(Interruptions)

The Minister is replying!

(Interruptions)

And you do not intervene in my work!

Mr X. L. Duval: With all due respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, time is money.

Mr Speaker: This is not the issue. The issue is the Minister is replying. You have to wait.

Mr X. L. Duval: I cannot wait...

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me answer. What happened when the contract was allocated after a tendering exercise in 2019 to Vitol is that they used the same specification as in 2016 when the contract was again allocated to Mangalore Refinery. So,

since there was no reference to the manganese level in 2016, obviously, in the 2019 contract, there was no reference to manganese level to be present.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, given Vitol's record for corruption, I do not believe a word that I have been told just now. I will table the tender dated March 2019. I don't know why the Minister is going back to 2016. March 2019, it says clearly manganese content, maximum 2 milligrams per litre. So, it was not forgotten here, whereas when the lowest supplier of this tender was given the contract through emergency procurement, then it was forgotten. Forget about Mangalore. We are talking about this March 2019, hon. Minister.

How can you tell me it was forgotten when it was here? And we are talking about the lowest tenderer for this particular tender, which was then given as emergency procurement, and we know about what emergency procurement means. I will table this also, with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will re-table what was tabled before by the hon. Minister as to the agreed specifications for ease of reference.

Mr Callichurn: Yes. Can I answer, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr X. L. Duval: I will table Mangalore; its agreed specifications, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the document that is being tabled is in respect to a tender that was cancelled.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes

Mr Callichurn: No, listen! It is very serious. This document pertains to a tender which was cancelled, and then procurement was done through emergency procurement procedures after. Earlier, when I stated that there was no mention as regards the level of manganese, that reference was in respect to the contract allocated using the emergency procedures.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is new. He should have referred to the previous PNQs replied here in this House, in that when they went to see Vitol Bahrain, it was following their tender being the lowest tender; in that particular tender which I have just tabled. So, it is totally related.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to now come to the SGS. So, what he has admitted, Mr Speaker, Sir, is, in fact, what the hon. Minister Sawmynaden previously told us. But in vague words! That is, all the adulterated petrol supplies agreed to specifications because the specifications themselves were wrong and, therefore, SGS continued to give clean testing

certificates because they were not testing for manganese. Is that, hon. Minister, what, in fact, you have said and I'm just confirming?

Mr Callichurn: I did not say that, Mr Speaker, Sir, because SGS was not testing for manganese when the petroleum products were being discharged in Mauritius. They were only checking the level, that is, the quantity of the products.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, given that we have 3,300 car owners who have suffered - some terribly suffered; cars have had to be scrapped - as we know today, resulting from what the Minister said, a deliberate or not deliberate omission in the tender specifications, will STC now, despite the fact that it has so many billions to pay, do the right thing and compensate immediately all the persons who have suffered from this and not wait for the Court case? Because the hon. Minister himself admitted today, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there was an omission on the part of STC. Deliberate or not, that is for someone else to find out.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come back to the previous question. SGS started to test for manganese in petroleum products as from December 2019. So, before December 2019, they were not testing for manganese in petroleum products. As regards this question, Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, there are several cases before the Court and, obviously, I will not comment on these cases as they are *sub judice*. Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask what, in fact, the hon. Minister is proposing. Is he proposing that we continue like that? What about the 3,300 motor vehicle owners?

Mr Callichurn: I am not ...

Mr X. L. Duval: What about the fact that you need to investigate whether this omission was deliberate or not deliberate? What are you, in fact, proposing? Because it was your predecessor before.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be for the Court to decide. There is a report from a firm called Minton Treharne & Davies Group. The report is sufficiently detailed and the issues canvassed in that report will be thrashed out or discussed in Court. So, at this stage, I cannot take any commitment.

Mr X. L. Duval: Being given, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we were supplied with petrol which had a lot of manganese in it - you agree yourself - this petrol is far cheaper than

properly refined petrol. And we know that we have, at least, two shipments of this adulterated petrol arriving in Mauritius. What was the claim that Government made against Vitol Bahrain E.C. for this? Did the hon. Minister ask for a reduction in price?

Mr Callichurn: Actually, the contract we had with Vitol Bahrain E.C. has ended and they will supply as per the new specifications given to them. Before, like you said, there was no mention of manganese. This is done; they will supply according to the new specifications.

Mr X. L. Duval: Given that adulterated petrol was supplied in October and November, at least these two months, and a few months later, on 01 February 2020, this same Vitol Bahrain E.C., having received an Emergency Procurement contract for six months, was given a second Emergency Procurement contract, at what price, it was never disclosed, for another six months, may I ask the hon. Minister whether that is the case? That there have been, despite all this, two Emergency Procurement contracts given to Vitol Bahrain E.C., the same supplier that has been punished by FBI and United States Department of Justice?

Mr Callichurn: Well, I do not have this information with me. I am not aware that another contract was given under Emergency Procurement.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are getting a piece of paper; it is coming. Is that the case?

Mr Callichurn: I am informed that, yes, there was another contract given to Vitol Bahrain E.C. but not under the same condition as the previous one. It was under a different condition, that is, manganese-free.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister did not mention the magic word. Is it Emergency Procurement, please? Can he give us the magic word?

Mr Callichurn: Like I said, I have been forwarded with an answer, but whether it was under Emergency Procurement, I cannot answer at the moment.

Mr X. L. Duval: This is my last question by the way, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is my last question by the way, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister tell us, with regard to the famous trip to Paris by previous Minister Sawmynaden for the long weekend, who accompanied the Minister officially on that trip?

Mr Callichurn: I am informed that the former Director General of STC, Mr Ramasamy, accompanied the former Minister of Commerce to meet with Vitol Bahrain E.C.

Mr X. L. Duval: Let us ask the hon. Minister whether the same Mr Ramasamy...

Mr Callichurn: And then, let me just add that the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry also formed part of that delegation.

Mr X. L. Duval: So, two out of three of these persons were subsequently fired. Can I ask one last thing since we have a little bit of time? The previous Minister went on and on about octane boosters, so many kilos, thousands of kilos of octane boosters. But, according to him, it was a plausible excuse for the problems. It was absolutely false, of course. Did the Ministry take any action to ban octane boosters from importation in Mauritius?

Mr Callichurn: Well, octane boosters have been used in this country since a long time and are still being used by vehicle owners. So, it was common practice for the use of octane boosters to complement the quality of petrol.

Mr Speaker, Sir, earlier, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Time over!

Mr Callichurn: Just on a point of clarification. Earlier, the hon. Leader of the Opposition filed a report suggesting or insinuating that the owner of Vitol Bahrain E.C. was prosecuted. I am informed that Vitol Bahrain E.C was fined by the US Department of Justice in December 2020 by...

(Interruptions)

So, that was after. In 2019, there was no conviction and there was no case against Vitol Bahrain E.C.

Mr Speaker Sir: Time over!

Mr Callichurn: I am also...

Mr Speaker Sir: Time is over! I am sorry; your officers should be diligent. Time over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(12.06 p.m.)

PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE APPROPRIATION (2021-2022) BILL 2021
(NO. X OF 2021)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Appropriation ((2021-2022) Bill 2021 (No. X of 2021).

Question again proposed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor. I cannot start my intervention without first paying tribute to late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, a true patriot who dedicated his life to this country.

It is always a pleasure to address the National Assembly on the Budget debates. May I, at the very outset, put on record my thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance and his team for the Budget 2021-2022, During the preparation of the Budget, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, took the time to meet each Minister personally, PPS, hon. Members of Government and other stakeholders. I must say he has been very responsive.

In normal times, we know how difficult it is to present a good Budget but now in such a crisis situation, the exercise becomes even more daunting. So, my gratitude goes to the Minister of Finance and his team who have worked tirelessly to process the Budget. I want to take a moment to thank our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, for his Vision and Leadership. Our Prime Minister is a man of action and is doing his utmost to move this country forward.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a mandate of five years. This is our second Budget. There are three more Budgets to come. We are confident that each future Budget will bring new measures for the well-being of our people. The Budget 2021-2022 has been prepared and presented during the COVID-19 pandemic ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Behave yourself, Leader of the Opposition! There is a speech going on.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: ... a very difficult time for all of us at a global level. This crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir, is without precedent. We are all navigating without a map. Events are evolving in minutes, not in hours, days or weeks. We cannot ignore the fact that this pandemic has a direct and dramatic impact on the daily lives of every single person around the world.

COVID-19 has turned the global economy upside down with a devastating impact on the economy of all countries, leading to social issues. Each Government could have a different approach to this crisis but one thing is certain, Mr Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a crisis that requires Government action with important social and economic outcomes. Balancing the social and economic aspects is indeed a complex task. However, what is important is that the Budget has successfully struck the balance between the two. With the present Budget, the Minister of Finance has given the Government the necessary tools to respond quickly to events, to boost the economy and also to continue supporting the most vulnerable.

Much has been said already on the Budget by Members on both sides of the House, I have listened attentively to the intervention of Members on both sides of the House. What is disappointing is that a number of Opposition Members do not seem to understand the reality we are facing or are they pretending not to understand? If they would have made the same speeches in other circumstances, I would have understood. Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that people outside understand the seriousness of the situation.

The population in general have faith in the Budget. They know that the Government is leaving no stone unturned to address the challenges our country is facing. Mr Speaker, Sir, following the presentation of the Budget, I have had the opportunity to speak to many people from different walks of life. I can tell the House that they warmly welcome the Budget. They know that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our priorities are not the same. Our priorities have changed, these are not normal times.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the storm is not over. Who can say with certainty what the future holds? We are in a period of uncertainty and maybe we will have to readjust our priorities as the situation evolves. This is the truth.

Let me, at this stage, turn to the business community. Let us see together what do they have to say about the Budget 2021/2022? Thankfully, Mr Speaker, Sir, I see that the business

community at large, unlike the Opposition, has grasped the spirit of the Budget. Let us see some of the reactions from major institutions published in the local Press.

Let me start with Business Mauritius –

“Le budget mise sur la relance plutôt que l'austérité. Plusieurs mesures annoncées ramèneront la confiance au sein de la communauté des affaires. »

Ernst & Young (EY) –

“Un budget qui montre une continuité dans la politique et qui devrait inspirer confiance pour la phase de croissance à venir. »

L'Association des hôteliers et restaurateur de l'île Maurice –

“Nous accueillons la réouverture avec soulagement et satisfaction, également soulagé que le gouvernement maintienne jusqu'à septembre l'aide au salaire. »

Association of Mauritian Manufacturers –

“Un ensemble de mesures à saluer, des mesures pour inciter à la consommation des produits locaux. »

Mauritius Bankers Association –

“Les mesures annoncées pour le secteur bancaire aideront Maurice à quitter la liste noire de l'Union européenne. »

Let me end with Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture –

“L'installation moderne de stockage du sucre de 150,000 tonnes à Riche Terre est favorable à l'industrie. »

These comments, Mr Speaker, Sir, are not from Government Members, these comments are from independent institutions. As you can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, the comments are not bad at all, very encouraging, the institutions understand the present situation. Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is the reality of the Budget? The reality of the Budget is that it does a lot to support those who need our care. That is why I applaud the Budget. There is a lot in the Budget on social care. Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to focus the remainder of my remarks on the array of social measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our good actions date as far back as 2014. Some actions, which come to my mind are the increase in Pensions, not only Basic Retirement Pension but all the Basic

Pensions, Widows, Invalid, Orphans, payment of School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examination fees for second time students; a vast set of measures to fight absolute poverty, to name a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, do you know the total Budget of my Ministry? Rs39.26 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. This amount represents 26.95% of the total national Budget.

Mr Speaker: Social distancing there! Please continue!

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Does the Opposition realise how much we are investing in social care? Never in our history has, Mr Speaker, Sir, any Government done so much for our people. Our hon. Prime Minister believes in people, that is why I will say, anybody can be a critic, *mais il faut être responsable dans ses propos*. What is wrong with the present Budget when so much attention is being given to our elderly, persons with disabilities, widows, orphans and families under the SRM.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to see that there has been an emphasis on social measures, more funding has been provided. The Budget sets the tone with a high social agenda. In these difficult times, you will agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, our duty is to shield our people. Allow me to share a few noteworthy statistics regarding beneficiaries under the Social Security division of my Ministry.

Since 2014, the beneficiaries of the four Basic Pensions combined have increased from 244,400 to reach 302,606 in the Financial Year 2020/2021. This represents an increase of 23.8% since 2014. My Ministry's budget for pension has, therefore, more than doubled over the years. From Rs14.7 billion in 2014 to Rs36.7 billion in 2020/2021, an increase of 149% for that particular period.

Let me tell you the amount budgeted for each Basic Pension in the Estimates of 2021/2022 –

- (a) Basic Retirement Pension - Rs28.9 billion;
- (b) Basic Invalidity Pension - Rs3.8 billion;
- (c) Basic Widows Pension - Rs2.15 billion, and
- (d) Basic Orphans Pension - Rs41 m.

My colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has said it in his Budget Speech, I quote –

“Despite the difficult situation, we have decided to maintain the Basic Pension at Rs9,000 monthly for those aged 60 years and above. This is in line with our philosophy”.

Why, Mr Speaker, Sir? Because *nos ainées sont ceux qui nous ont transmis notre histoire, nos croyances et nos valeurs. Nos ainées constituent la fondation de notre société. Notre existence découle de leurs efforts et leurs contributions à la société. Nous devons en être redevables à vie.* This is our philosophy, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In these difficult times, we could have gone to extreme to reduce Basic Pensions and other allowances given to vulnerable people but we did no such thing. We have maintained the support that is being given. In fact, where possible, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have increased the support. So, *je laisse la population déduire qui parle un langage de vérité.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to briefly comment on one social measure announced in the Budget 2020-2021 and implemented thereafter to the satisfaction of the population at large: *visite médicale à domicile.* You will recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the monthly home medical visits were provided at a certain point in time only to children with disabilities, below the age of 18, and to bedridden persons aged 75 and above. Then, in the Budget 2019-2020, this care was extended to bedridden persons aged 60 and above. In the Budget 2020-2021 we went a step further, we removed the age criteria on home medical visits for bedridden and severely disabled persons. We are now able to reach out to some 26,000 beneficiaries. Also to provide a more efficient service, the Ministry has recruited some 250 more medical practitioners in 2020. The home medical visits have increased from 77,683 to 177,200. This is the reality, Mr Speaker, Sir.

I must say also that there is continuity in our actions. Year by year, we are increasing social protection. As such, we are now increasing the basic orphan’s pension from Rs7,000 to Rs8,000 for beneficiaries up to the age of 23. We are also extending the incontinence allowance to a greater number of beneficiaries by removing the age criteria. Actually, we cater for some 1,423 beneficiaries. Now, that this measure has been extended, we will be catering for 1,265 additional beneficiaries, bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 2,688.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to disability, our Government has a philosophy of inclusiveness. Let me say a few words about the Disability Bill. We, on this side of the House, we know that the Disability Bill is important. Questions have been put by the Opposition on the status of the Bill. Rightly so. I agree that the Bill is taking time;

however, I can assure the House that the needful is being done for the introduction of the Bill in Parliament. We are trying to cover as many aspects as possible, but, most importantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to make sure we can implement what we will be proposing. I want to point out also that this does not mean that we are waiting for the Disability Bill to continue enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities. The fact is, since 2014, a set of measures have been taken. The House is aware of all these measures. I will not take the time of the House to enumerate one by one, but we all know that a series of measures have been taken so far. The measures announced in the present Budget is yet another signal of our Government's duty towards persons with disabilities –

- (i) the upgrading of four public beaches to make them accessible to persons with disabilities;
- (ii) the increase in the budget granted to NGOs running SEN schools from Rs138 m. to Rs151 m.;
- (iii) the grant to new registered NGOs to support SEN students with autism and those suffering from visual and hearing difficulties;
- (iv) the upgrading works and setting up of day-care wards for autistic children at the five regional hospitals;
- (v) accessibility to learning materials, activity books adapted for learners of Grades 1 to 6 with visual, hearing, intellectual impairment, as well as autism, and
- (vi) the acquisition of braille notes for secondary school students with severe visual impairments.

This is the reality Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, let me turn to the Social Integration Division of my Ministry. Here, I would like to take a moment to respond to hon. Uteem, who said: "increasing the amount of financial assistance to persons on Social Register is fine, but is not enough". The hon. Member went further to say that eradicating poverty should not be limited to hands out. True, Mr Speaker, Sir, but what the hon. Member seems to forget is that Government's support is not limited to financial assistance and hands out. Since the implementation of the Marshall Plans against poverty in 2016, the Ministry has put in place a number of schemes to support vulnerable households eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius. Yes, this scheme does include financial assistance, and that is not all. We focus on education, housing, training, unemployment, health empowerment, mind-set and attitude. Our schemes are geared towards

ending intergenerational poverty. We want the children to aspire to a better future. We empower vulnerable families so that they may stand on their feet. We provide case management support, so they may resolve their issues and lead better lives. What is the ultimate goal, Mr Speaker, Sir? We do not want them to remain dependent on Government's support forever. We want them to be empowered so they can eventually live independent lives.

Allow me to highlight the key measures taken by the Ministry so far. Let me start with the Monthly Subsistence Allowance Scheme. For the Financial Year 2020-2021, an amount of Rs192 m. has been paid to some 9,800 households, both in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Since 2016 to June 2021, a total of nearly Rs1 billion has been disbursed in favour of our beneficiaries.

The Monthly Child Allowance paid to encourage families to send their children to school for 2020-2021, around Rs44 m was disbursed. Since the introduction of this scheme in January 2017, a total of Rs362 m. has been paid in favour of some 12,000 children.

Coming to the School Premium Scheme, in the form of a cash award paid upon successful completion of Grade 9, SC, HSC, and Tertiary Education respectively, for the Financial Year 2020-2021, a total of Rs720,000 has been paid in favour of some students who have successfully completed their tertiary education. As you can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, more and more students are striving for a better future and to the best of our ability, we are giving them all the support.

The Free Examination Fees Scheme, since the introduction of the scheme, some Rs8 m. has been paid out. The School Material Scheme for the academic year 2020, some Rs74 m. has been disbursed to a total of 17,177 students. Since 2017 about Rs199 m. has been disbursed to 84,679 children under the SRM. Training programmes to allow our beneficiaries to become economically empowered for the Financial Year 2020-2021, some 1,122 beneficiaries have been trained.

We have also addressed Life Enhancement Education Programme, Mr Speaker, Sir, to boost the self-esteem, family ties and communication of our beneficiaries. As at date, a total of 1199 beneficiaries have benefited from this scheme. We also have the Crèche Scheme and, here, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to provide clarification in response to the same hon. Member I mentioned earlier. The hon. Member, at one point, spoke of children under the SRM who cannot attend pre-schools because they cannot afford to pay the fees. This is not

correct. Maybe the hon. Member is not aware that families under the SRM can benefit from a monthly crèche allowance of Rs2,000 per child, which is paid to registered child-day-care centres to enable mothers to take up employment or undergo training.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me shortly comment on the new interesting measures announced, regarding beneficiaries under the Social Register of Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are bringing the poverty threshold to a minimum of Rs3,000 and a maximum of Rs10,500 as compared to a minimum of Rs2,720 to a maximum of Rs9,520 as mentioned in 2016. What does this mean? This means that the absolute poverty threshold for an adult is increasing from Rs2,720 to Rs3,000 while that of a child is increasing from Rs1,360 to Rs1,500. This, of course, will allow more families to benefit from support.

I think it is interesting also to see what we are doing for vulnerable households who are not eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius. Households earning a monthly income between Rs10,500 and Rs14,000 will also be eligible to register for support under the National Database for vulnerable groups. Why this measure, Mr Speaker, Sir? During the first confinement in 2020, we realised that there are many people who are not in absolute poverty, but who still need support. COVID-19 has put many families in a more fragile position. So how to help those who are not in absolute poverty, who are not eligible, under the SRM, but still need some form of assistance? The National Database for Vulnerable Groups is our proposed solution. Under this new database, eligible households will benefit from empowerment support, educational support, training, employment opportunities and life skills. We will achieve this through a collaborative and holistic approach between my Ministry and institutions, including NGOs.

Provision has also been made for the extension of free access to broadband internet to SRM families. This measure was first introduced in the Budget 2019-2020 and has been extended each year since. Around 5,600 families have since gained access to broadband internet with the collaboration of the Mauritius Telecom.

I must also remind the House, at this point, that my Ministry has procured tablets for students of Grades 10 to 13 who are eligible under the SRM. A first batch of 542 students of Grades 10 to 13, have received tablets to enable them to have access to online facilities for their studies. As new families join the SRM, of course, eligible students will benefit from this scheme.

Our Prime Minister has always said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that money should not be a barrier to education. All children should have the same chance, the same opportunity. With the measures focused on the provision of technological tools for education, we are making sure children are not left behind.

To sum up, Mr Speaker, Sir, there can be no doubt that this is an excellent budget for unpredictable times. The budget is going in the right direction; the budget leaves no one behind. Of course, the challenge now is in the implementation. The announcement of the setting up of a Committee to monitor the implementation of the budget measures to be chaired by the hon. Prime Minister himself is warmly welcomed.

So, on this side of the House, we have faith in the budget and the present budget has the very best intention.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(12.36 p.m.)

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East):

Mr Speaker, Sir, being among the last interveners, I will try not to debate on issues that have already been canvassed by my colleagues from the Opposition side. Having said so, and then through the Budget Speech, I note at the outset what could be described as economic mismanagement.

Let me explain. This Budget Speech is characterised by flagrant absence of expected reforms and bold measures that would have helped revive the economy. Our economic indicators are in the red and the country has performed worse than expected. The GDP in 2020 contracted by almost 15% against an initial forecast of 7%. Our debt to GDP rocketed to 95% while unemployment increased to 9.2% and this figure will unfortunately be on the rise, this year again.

The economy is at a very critical state and many issues of mismanagement related to COVID in the Healthcare and in the Industry and Commerce Ministries, are added to the list of problems that are looming over the taxpayer's head. If the Finance Minister hopes that the economic growth will save him, then he is simply delusional as he has not convinced us where this growth will come from.

The plan to raid the reserves of the Bank of Mauritius is only an accounting treachery that has failed to address overall debt. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, today's debt is simply tomorrow's taxes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over the past 5 years, economists have raised the alarm about the precarious state of our economy, given the excessive spending that is being taken from Government funds. With the launch of prestige projects and a lack of vigilance regarding public funds, in general, our economic situation was deteriorating further. Laws have been enacted to breakdown the locks of the Central Bank, in order to use copiously, without the slightest restraint, the reserves of the Bank of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have, before us, a budget that is a repeat of last year's, both in substance and in form. A budget that wants to be respected in public opinion is based on two fundamentals: revenue and expenditure. For example, as a head of family, his main concern before thinking about embarking on expenses, he must make sure that he has a means to do so. If he wants to acquire beautiful things for the well-being of his family, he must work harder to increase his income, so as not to get bogged down in debts at the risk of mortgaging the very future of his children. But, in Mauritius, the Minister of Finance thinks differently; his appetite for debt has no limits.

The news is as bleak as can be expected and this is just a taste, difficult times are coming and they will need to be carefully managed. It would be entirely neglectful of us if we do not take this unprecedented opportunity for genuine change.

And in the same vein, I also note that this Budget Speech do not propose anything to curb indebtedness. On the contrary, we continue to borrow massively to finance expenses when we do not produce in terms of economic wealth. As a result, public debt has increased to Rs420 billion that is 95% of Gross Domestic Product. The country is in debt up to Rs420 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can you imagine that? How are we going to bail out our economy? No notable indicators, nothing in sight.

With such massive indebtedness, it is the future generation who suffers the consequences. The entire future is being mortgaged. Let the Government be warned, the alarm bells have been rung and at the same time we can see that our rupee continues to depreciate and is losing ground against foreign currencies. For example, for Euro, depreciation reaches 25% and for the Dollar, 20%.

I will not go in the details. My colleague has already given the example of commodities but this has a huge impact on the economic sector as we import almost three times more than we export, and as a result, imported products are more expensive and the bill has been passed automatically to consumers who are already having enormous difficulties in meeting the family's expenses. As a result, the cost of living in Mauritius continues to rise inevitably of what I call economic mismanagement. Adding to that, it is no surprise that on the other hand, inflation rate has increased. There is also a lack of political will on the part of Government to curb inflation.

Price controls are almost non-existent, people at the bottom of the ladder will suffer and this will last. People have to suffer with cascading effect of this erosion of their purchasing power which has a negative impact on their standard of living. The more so, as prices of basic foodstuffs, such as chicken, meat, fish amongst others continue to rise, the grumbling is spreading all over the economy.

Is there a pricing policy? I doubt it, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mercantilism is full swing, consumers are being skinned, prices are going up, family incomes are falling, the country imports massively as I said much more than it exports. This is an explosive situation, with the depreciation of the rupee people pay more for their amenities and the Government collects more VAT. We just need to read the item tax on goods and services, the expected VAT revenue will be Rs75 billion.

This speaks volume, Mr Speaker, Sir. It has been increased from Rs55 billion to Rs75 billion over a year, that is, an increase of 36% and it is being proclaimed from the rooftops that there will be no additional tax. What a fib, Mr Speaker, Sir! Instead of acknowledging the failure of its monetary and fiscal policy, it persists and signs instead of talking about his previous budget and acknowledging where it did not work, the Minister of Finance impetuously persists in the same way. Mr Speaker, Sir, the same recipe in a situation of social and economic crisis will necessarily give the same result.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to some very important issues that have been canvassed by the Director of Audit in his latest report and some really shocking and disturbing facts. As we are aware, the National Audit Office constitutes the supreme audit institution of Mauritius and is headed by the Director of Audit. The office of the Director of Audit is established under the Constitution of Mauritius to develop an independent and objective assessment of the process of governance and to enhance legislative oversight on

Government operations. The Constitution of Mauritius provides for the appointment authority and specific conditions of service of the Director of Audit, as well as his independence and security of tenure.

Section 110 of the Constitution provides that in the exercise of his function, the Director of Audit shall be subjected to the direction and control of no person or authority. In response to COVID-19, Government has, over the period March to December 2020, spent some Rs14 billion on the procurement of medical products, payments under the assistance scheme and quarantine charges. The whole procurement exercise has been managed by several authorities, but mainly by the High-Level Committee set up at the level of the Prime Minister's Office.

The remarks of the Director of Audit were really disturbing in terms of limitation in the performance of his duties. He stated, Mr Speaker, Sir, "the scope of my audit was severely affected by the non-availability of important records and information in various cases". This speaks volume, Mr Speaker, Sir. While carrying out his audit, he stated that "my staff faces considerable difficulties to obtain records." The National Audit Office was informed by the ICAC which secured 60 procurement files from the Ministry of Health and Wellness for its enquiry. Information regarding procurement procedures was requested from the Ministry of Health but most remains unattended till date. That is at the date he was writing his report. In these circumstances, the scope of the audit was heavily impaired. So he could not perform his audit.

On 25 January, after the completion of the audit, the Ministry informed National Audit Office that there is no objection on his part for National Audit Officers to access these files at ICAC, Mr Speaker, Sir. Only after they had done their job, completed their audit, then the files were made available to the auditors. Clearly, this was a delaying tactic to prevent the auditors from doing their job and these critiques are not from me, it comes from the Director of Audit. You cannot accuse the Opposition of saying things or inventing things that do not exist, Mr Speaker, Sir.

And, if we go into the details, I will give some examples whereby 60 ventilators were acquired for Rs94 m. for which no benefits have yet been derived. 50 of these ventilators were acquired from a foreign company which has never supplied any medical equipment to the Ministry. The contract of the supply of 37 out of 46 drugs that was awarded directly to a wholesale pharmacy which was not a regular supplier to the Ministry and we know who it

was. And this one I think, this is the best of, there was a significant increase in the price quoted, ranging from 15% to 3300%. I have never heard of such things, Mr Speaker, Sir. 3300% increase in the price of 37 drugs procured under the emergency procurement exercise.

When you imagine that under COVID-19 how people were suffering, how the country was suffering, some people used COVID-19 to make business and used COVID-19 to make business on taxpayers' money and today they have the guts to give us a lesson.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Director of Audit, again in his Report stated that interest of Government was not adequately safeguarded since advanced payment of the full contract value were effected to suppliers before delivery of the item. So, you are getting paid before you deliver. So, if there is a problem, the supplier has nothing to worry, it has already been paid. Okay, and, again, clause of late delivery was not included as a condition in the Letter of Acceptance issued to the Supplier and therefore was not applicable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, they used Emergency Procurement to acquire material and equipment quickly. The whole purpose of Emergency Procurement, so that you get delivered very quickly and you do not put a clause on late delivery? For me, either this was done either from incompetence or it was done on purpose. It was done on purpose so that they can get away with murder, and this is what happened, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The lack of monitoring in the midst of the crisis has resulted in some Rs94 m. paid for defective ventilators and Rs853 m. for medical disposables purchased from companies which has no history of providing medical products to Government and abnormally high prices paid by the Ministry of Health and Wellness up to 67 times higher than the last price paid for the medical disposable by the Ministry. When you think of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I take an example, if the Ministry has bought a drug or an equipment or a disposable for, let us say, Rs1,000 during COVID-19, do you know how much they have paid for the same material? They paid it for Rs67, 000 and we have to accept this and up to now, there has been no reaction on the Government side, I must say. And also, the Director of Audit also stated that no documentary evidence in respect of authorisation of medical products acquired for some Rs1.7 billion was produced to National Audit Officers by the different Ministries and departments. National Audit staffs were informed that decisions were taken by a committee set up at the level of Ministry of Health and Wellness for which neither the agenda, no minutes of decision taken were available and their excuse was that instruction had been received from the High-Level Committee for COVID-19, set under the aegis of the Prime

Minister's Office, for which, as I said, no documentary evidence was produced Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, preliminary lessons from the current situation suggests, these are the words of the Director of Audit that we need to rethink risk and contract management framework, in future procurement procedures and contract to ensure that Emergency Procurement in the public sector does not turn out to become a fertile ground for commission and financial abuses and malpractices. I say it again, these are not my words, these are the words of the Director of Audit.

It is high time that the accountability and transparency in the field of Public Procurement be reviewed. There may be temptation to focus only on the pressing needs created by the pandemic and to side line consideration for accountability and transparency. We know the argument of Government was that we had to buy urgently, but Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing, justifies the flouting of the principles of good governance when it involves public funds. Nothing justifies this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must emphasise that the Director of Audit has been very courageous in underlying and denouncing numerous cases of malpractices which could tantamount to fraud. *M. le président, c'est une motion de blâme qu'il a délivrée à l'encontre de ce gouvernement.*

Now, let me move on, on another item that has been canvassed by the Director of Audit and also which has been subject to several PQs in the House, it relates to MauBank. Mr Speaker, Sir, over the years and up to 30 June 2020, Government has invested a total of Rs5.2 billion as Equity Injection in MauBank Holdings Ltd. It was invested in 2019 and also in 2020, and I must say out of this investment, not a Rupee of dividend has been paid to Government out of this Rs5.2 billion.

The Auditors mentioned in their Report, as far as non-performing loans that were transferred from MauBank Holdings through a subsidiary. The subsequent recovery may represent a major challenge as these loans have originally been granted without proper credit base and without adequate conditions and collaterals. How do you want a bank to make profit if they lend money to someone who does not give any collateral or does not give any proper mortgage?

In view of the Negative Group Equity, the Auditors of MauBank has had to take an undertaking from its shareholders that is the Government of Mauritius, and for this the

Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development had issued a Letter of Comfort, that is Government had to guarantee MauBank for the loans that has had to be impaired and also, the recovery for loans that has already been given it represents only Rs1.2 m. out of Rs5.1 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. And up to now, MauBank Holdings has accumulated losses of Rs5.9 billion in 2018 and in 2019, Rs6.3 billion. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tempted to say, this is what we call throwing good money after bad. This is a clear example of throwing good money after bad, what is happening in MauBank.

Now, let me move to another project which again, we are talking only about billions today. I do not know whether it was, I did not do it on purpose but when I read the Auditor's Report, the project was only billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. It relates to the Safe City Project. The police force has signed two contracts on an operating lease model with Mauritius Telecom for the implementation of Safe City Project. The contract amount was USD 465 m., as I said, USD, exclusive of VAT. There are some disturbing facts and also it has been subject to a PNQ by the Leader of the Opposition, whereas the lease agreements were not made available to National Audit Officers, access provided to only certain extracts of the agreements. The Police service explained that the arguments could not be provided due to a clause of mutual non-disclosure under the terms and condition of the agreement but section 110(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Mauritius provides that –

“The public accounts of Mauritius and all courts of law and all authorities and officers of the Government shall be audited and reported by the Director of Audit and for that purpose the Director of Audit or any person authorised by him in that behalf shall have access to all books, records, reports and other documents relating to those accounts”

It is crystal clear, the powers of the Director of Audit which is guaranteed by the Constitution, he has the right of access to every document when it is in relation to tax payers' money. The auditors' remarks where the constitutionality of clauses in contracts that deprives the Director of Audit of access to public records for audit purposes is questionable. The Police informed the National Audit that the advice of the Attorney General's Office was being sought on this matter and we don't know where matters stand in relation to that. Mr Speaker, Sir, what is more troubling is that, even though the lease agreements were not made available, on the pretext of non-disclosure clause, but payment vouchers supporting documents, invoices, even these also were not made available. We understand the contract can be confidential; even though we cannot have access, the Director of Audit should have had access. What about when payments were being done, what about payment vouchers,

invoices, and so on? That's why the Director stated in his report that the accuracy and validity of payments made could not be ascertained.

And, since we are on Safe City, Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody knows that our society is in a very bad shape in terms of Law and Order; security. There is a big problem of insecurity. People are being attacked, killed, violence is on the rise. No place is reassuring. The protection of every citizen must be of utmost importance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the cameras of Safe City cost the Mauritians, the State, taxpayers, the sum of Rs20 billion and the main objective of such a massive investment was to enhance public order/security and to help combat all sorts of crimes. How come that when the need to elucidate a crime, images deemed essential, crucial, suddenly disappear? We invested Rs20 billion in cameras to help combat crimes, but when we badly needed those images, they suddenly disappear! As I said, such a huge sum of public money was invested.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this kind of casualness is simply unacceptable. Government has been boasting on Safe City cameras, but when put on trial in the case of Kistnen, they failed miserably. How do you want Mauritians to have faith in Government projects, the more so managed by the Police? How do you want the Mauritians to have faith in this Government and in this Police Force? That's why people in Mauritius have little or no trust in the Police Force. With '*L'affaire Kistnen*', Safe City Project has lost all its credibility, Mr Speaker, Sir. *Ce n'est pas de gaité de cœur que je dis cela, M. le président*, because it's with our money that this project has been done.

And in the same line of thought, even in the prisons also the cameras are not functioning, Mr Speaker, Sir. This has been subject to numerous questions by myself and my colleagues on the Opposition side and this also has been canvassed by the Director of Audit, yet another example of poor management of public funds.

Those cameras have not been functioning since 2014 and no decision has been taken to replace them. But if the cameras were faulty since 2013 and 2014, then, replace them! Every year, we hear in the House that this was done by the previous Government. Fair enough! But if we have a problem, fix it! You don't sleep over it! In relation to those cameras, how not to forget the statement of the former Commissioner of Prisons to the effect that he does not believe in cameras! How can we forget that, Mr Speaker, Sir? And you know what happened after he made this statement, this *fracas*, he was promoted Advisor to the Prime Minister on matters of prisons! I guess what he will advise the Prime Minister; maybe,

he will tell him to remove all the cameras of the Safe City because he doesn't believe in cameras. This is in total contradiction with Government's policy of installing cameras around the island. And as I said, he was promoted Advisor to the Prime Minister, but I must check also whether he was decorated for Independence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me again come to something which I only took cognizance yesterday or the day before, and I was showing this to my friend, hon. Uteem. Some really disturbing and again shocking fact in the Report of the Director of Audit, which I must say, has gone unnoticed. I, myself, it's only two days that I saw that in the Report. It's in relation to Public Sector Bodies Pension Fund deficit. In fact, this is the last part of the Report and that is why, maybe, we have omitted such a huge thing. You know, the Public Sector Bodies Pension Fund deficits total a whopping sum of Rs26 billion. Rs26 billion! That is, there is a deficit in the pension funds of Public Sector Bodies and I will try to explain because it's a bit technical; I will try to simplify it. The financial statements of 60 Public Sector Bodies, only 60, because there are more submitted to the National Audit Office, showed that their pension fund under defined-benefit pension plan were running deficits, totalling Rs20 billion in 2018, and a review of 63 Public Sector Bodies submitted to the Director of Audit. When aggregate all the deficits, it comes up to Rs26 billion as at 30 June 2019. These figures are from 2019. Mr Speaker, Sir, do you know what that means? Say, for example, CWA or CEB, and I am sure they are on the list because they are Public Sector Bodies, it means that the pension that will be payable to its employees, when they go on retirement, would not be totally possible because there is not enough money to pay those pension. As I said, the fund is in deficit. This situation is of grave concern, Mr Speaker, Sir, and it should be addressed now because year after year, the deficit increases. I have given the figures. In 2018, it was Rs22 billion. In, 2019, it's Rs26 billion. Mr Speaker, Sir this is what I call a time bomb. We are sitting on a time bomb in relation to pension fund. It would be totally irresponsible from Government not to pay heed to this matter. There are solutions and experts, namely actuaries must be consulted. I think I have made my point in relation to that and hope that Government pays heed to this issue because, for me, it's a very important issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, and how not to come to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG)*! When we think what is happening in defined pension fund, this has to bring us to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a total mystery how the *CSG* will be financed in 2024. It is a total mystery! I will be really grateful to the Minister of Finance if he could enlighten the House, and the population, on such an important matter

because even the actuaries can't figure how this is going to work. He only has a recipe how the *CSG* will be financed after 2024 when after we have heard what's going on in defined pension contribution. I really hope that this issue is taken up by the Minister of Finance when he sums up the debate.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to say a few words on the offshore sector before I conclude. The offshore sector in Mauritius took birth in 1990s and since then, much has happened. It is good to highlight that the offshore model was endorsed by major economies of the world as this has enabled and propelled FDI into the global economy and, most importantly, in emerging economies such as India and in our more recent context, in Africa.

Our financial sector witnessed a sustained growth amidst financial crisis. It is the first time since its advent that the offshore sector witnessed a decelerated growth rate greatly due to COVID-19. With the global minimum tax lurking in the background, as a palpable threat, it is crucial that we, as a jurisdiction, we are prepared to face such a challenge. They will try to impose that over the world. It is a challenge. We cannot just welcome everything like that. Till now, we have just heard the intention of implementing such a system but we do not know how we would proceed. There is also the fact that before accepting any change, we must consider our domestic law.

The financial sector contributes 13% of GDP and employs 8635 people. It is the sector that supports and provides high value employment. It employs both Mauritians and foreigners. The sector represents the future. There are many opportunities for young graduates in this sector for posts like accountant, company secretary and asset managers, among others. It is the sector that has withstood the economic downturn caused by COVID. So, we need to deploy all efforts to safeguard, keep afloat and revamp the sector. We are again at a cross road.

It is imperative that we are removed from the adverse black list and grey list. We need to strive for more transparency in the way the offshore sector operates. While measures and efforts under the current mandate has been made, although we had no choice but to put all the odds on our side to come out of the adverse listing by international bodies, Government needs to put additional effort in terms of strategy, new lines of business and renewed diplomacy.

And coming to diplomacy, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that this has been lacking during the last mandate. Little or nothing has been done to nurture diplomatic relation with our African counterparts. We are an African jurisdiction and hence, we need to strengthen ties

with African brothers. *C'est incontournable* that Africa is a jurisdiction of the future and we, being an African country, should leverage on this. We are a premier financial jurisdiction and this has been recognised by international bodies like Mo Ibrahim Index and many more. We often brand that we are the platform, the gateway to Africa, what does that mean? It means that as a mature financial jurisdiction, we must act as a bridge between major economies and African countries to facilitate investments. We must provide a platform that is conducive to investments and in line with the current exigencies of investors. And this is a dynamic environment, we should be cognisant of technology needs and I must say, the introduction of the FSC one is a positive measure towards digitalisation of process and ease of doing business. It means that with sophisticated products, we should enable the growing wealth in Africa to be invested in or via Mauritius. It means with a reliable banking sector, we should be able to offer solutions, including digital solutions. We should be the one that enables Africa to grow. This is our contribution to Africa. Notwithstanding the challenges that have arisen over the years, our financial services sector has been resilient and has adapted itself. The mindset of the past is not sufficient in the actual context. It is the survival of the fittest, hence we need to think ahead of the curve and plan, have a strategic road map and I mean not just a document that is shelved but an actual and realistic plan that needs to be rolled out and implemented.

Moreover, for the better growth of this sector, it is important that there are constant discussions with all partners and stakeholders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, as a patriot, we look forward to being removed from all the adverse lists at the earliest and with the reopening of our borders, we really hope for a much needed boost to our economic landscape.

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Husnoo, you will speak when we resume.

At 1.16 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 3.05 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

**MINISTER OF LABOUR, HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING,
MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION –**

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

The Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr S. Callichurn): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to raise a point of clarification. Earlier, when answering to a supplementary question to the PNQ put by the Leader of the Opposition, I mentioned that Jonathan Ramasamy accompanied the then Minister of Commerce to Paris. Actually, this is not correct. The Permanent Secretary of the Minister of Commerce, the then Commercial Manager of STC, a representative of the SLO and a representative of SGS Mauritius Ltd accompanied the then Minister to Paris. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Husnoo!

(3.06 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, allow me to say a few words about Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Maybe the new generation is not aware of the economic and social condition prevailing in the 1970's and early 1980's. At that time, poverty was rife in the country. Unemployment level was catastrophic. As a young Paediatrician working in the hospital service in the early 1980's, I saw how many babies and children lost their lives with preventable conditions like malnutrition, gastroenteritis, etc. The facilities in our hospitals were rudimentary, sometimes, two to three persons sharing the same bed at the same time.

The Government did not have enough money to buy rice to feed the population. It was a very difficult time. We were even considering feeding the population on *patate* and *manioc* as during the World War II in the 1940's. That is the time when Sir Anerood Jugnauth took the reign of the country. And in five years' time, the country had changed and was on its way to become a more prosperous country: a feat which was acclaimed by not just the Mauritians, but many foreign countries and international institutions.

Secondly, his fight against drugs barons in Mauritius – he was the only Prime Minister who set up two commissions of inquiry to find a solution to this scourge. It is not an easy task. And even countries like the United States, with all the means at their disposal, are still having difficulties to solve this problem. At least, he had the courage and the determination to try to find a solution to this problem.

Name one past Prime Minister who has set up even one commission of inquiry on drugs? There are so many facets of his Prime Ministership which we can discuss but the last

one I would like to mention is his unflinching determination in his fight to complete our decolonisation process and to recover the Chagos Archipelago.

Mr Speaker, Sir, who does not remember when, he, at the age of 90, put on his lawyer's gown and went to plead this case personally at the International Court of Justice at La Haye. He was always convinced that Mauritius was right in this fight and he did manage to convince the judges; and the rest, Mr Speaker Sir, is history. May I also seize the opportunity to convey my sincere condolences to Lady Sarojini, to our Prime Minister and his family in this difficult time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Budget Speech 2021/2022, under the theme: Better Together.

Before going any further, I wish to congratulate my colleague, hon. Dr. Padayachy, Minister of Finance, for his second Budget Speech which, I am confident will enable our country to address this unprecedented economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On listening to Members of the Opposition, I get the impression as if they do not know in what context the Budget exercise was prepared. The world has been devastated by COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of people have been infected and millions have lost their lives across the globe. The economic situation in all countries has been severely affected and, naturally, this has impacted severely on the population at large leading to massive job loss and poverty across the world.

This was also associated with the closure of the borders leading to massive disruption of the air services, leading again to destruction of the international business and here in Mauritius, more importantly, the tourism industry.

It is in this context that the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has prepared this budget. So, can we expect the budget to be the usual run-of-the-mill budget? That is what some Members of the Opposition, forget and has not or rather pretend not to understand.

In Mauritius here, we have had two general lockdowns and several Red Zones, the tourism industry which is one of our major engine of growth has grinded to an almost complete halt. The contribution to GDP of the tourism sector in Mauritius direct and indirect was around 23%, that is, Rs62 billion in 2019 as compared to 2%, that is, on this 17 billion in 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the Government's vision was to attain 1.6 million tourists by the end of 2020, that is, to increase the tourism earning to 71 billion and to create around

2,200 employments, but, unfortunately, with the COVID-19 pandemic, this did not materialise.

The lockdown has also significantly affected all the sectors of the economy as well as leading to massive loss of jobs, for thousands of people who are associated consequential poverty. With this budget, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development is trying to kick-start the economy by giving an exceptional boost to the economy by saving a new economic architecture and restoring confidence. Besides, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development came up with a strategy to implement social measures to cater for the vulnerable group of our society, as well as introducing incentive and scheme for the ease of doing business and especially for the SME sector.

The second major problem which is facing Mauritius after COVID-19 is climate change. Our country has been victim of several episodes of flash flood in the recent years where we have witnessed loss of property and loss of lives. This is a very serious issue which the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has addressed in this budget by allocating 11.7 billion for the National Flood Management Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, most of our citizens have appreciated and lauded the measures in the budget except for some Members of the Opposition for whom *malheureusement, n'rien pas bon.*

It pains me when I look at some of the cheap comment made by some Members of the Opposition on the Budget –

“C'est une plagiat. Un budget rempli de mensonges, de fausses promesses, chiffres manipulés, enfoncés Morris dans une trou, Budget Padanomix ».

What have we not heard from the Opposition side, Mr Speaker, Sir? Allow me to take a few points raised by some Members of the Opposition. The Second Member of Constituency No.2 said –

“13 years later, we are still having flood”.

I must say that I was sorry to hear that from him because, with the global climate change, even if we put one drain in front of each and every house, Mr Speaker, Sir, we would not be able to prevent flooding.

According to a study conducted by 300 scientists in 20 countries and which just came out only this week, the global warming may have already passed the irreversible tipping point which means, from now on, the climate is going to get worse and worse. In Mauritius, for the foreseeable future, we should brace ourselves for all sorts of climate related disasters.

The Fourth Member of the Constituency No. 3 stated that this present Budget is –
“ du réchauffé de l’année dernière”.

He mentioned that the Sports Centre of Plaine Verte was mentioned last year and again, this year. When you look at the Budget for last year, for the construction of the Sports Infrastructure at Plaine Verte, only Rs6 m. was approved in the Budget Estimates and that was for the Consultancy Service to start the project, whereas this year, the project value has been mentioned as Rs151.5 m. and this is for the Construction of the Sports Centre. The first one last year was for the consultancy and this year, it is for the construction which shows, Mr Speaker, Sir, that some people does not even have an idea how project are implemented in the Government and it clearly shows their ignorance.

The same Member was also making a lot of insinuation about corruption in his speech. He is true to himself, Mr Speaker, Sir. Someone who has been found guilty by a Court of Law for bribing a Police Officer is now coming to give us lesson on morality! I leave that for the House to judge, Mr Speaker, Sir.

As far as the Third Member of Constituency No.5, he came with a long list of projects yesterday which apparently has not been started or not completed. I have taken just a few, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Plaza Theatre Phase III, a bidding exercise carried out, one aggrieved bidder challenged the decision that was taken –

- (1) He went to the Independent Review Panel;
- (2) He went for a Judicial Review, and now
- (3) The latter has gone to the Supreme Court.

And now how can we, at Local Government, proceed with the project?

Just a second example, District Councils, Head Office at Flacq, this was delayed partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown but here 90% of the work has been

completed and it is going to be fully operational by the end of September 2021, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Multipurpose Hall at Port Louis in Plaine Verte, la Route Militaire, again according to him, nothing is being done. This project is completed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and because of COVID-19, the engineers and the contractor could not do the asphalting of the parking.

Sports Centre of Plaine Verte, I think I have explained.

Incinerators, the COVID-19 pandemic last year slowed down the project. We have the engineers who came from India but unfortunately because of family situations, they had to go back. We could not proceed with it. That was one issue and secondly there was a conflict between the main contractor in India and the Local Partner and how is the Local Government at fault in this?

I can go, for Long Mountain Incinerator, *pareil enkor*, the first site that was chosen was objected by residents, the second site that was decided upon, again, was objected by residents and only the third site which we have got from Terra and the work is progressing. Is the Local Government to be blamed?

I can go on like that, I mean he mentioned about excavator at District Council of Pamplemousses. We do not have one person trained to drive this machine but he does not know, he was a Councilor there that when we bought that excavator, somebody was trained by the supplier who sells that to us, he was a trained one guy to drive this excavator and we have staff there. So, what I am trying to say, there are lot of inconsistency from what he has said yesterday.

Unfortunately, since the two lockdowns in 2020, this has caused some delay in the implementation of our projects. It is a fact but I can assure the House that I chaired the Project Implementation Monitoring Committee to check on the progress of all the major projects in all Local Authorities every month, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, to come and say these kind of cheap comments, I think it was not acceptable.

If you would allow me to go back to my speech, what some Members of the Opposition do not realise or do not want to realise is that, we are amongst the few countries in the world to have come up with such exceptional economic measures to boost up our economy during this pandemic which has caused havoc across the world.

Despite this difficult economic situation, we are expecting a 9% GDP growth for the fiscal year 2021/2022, while other developed countries are struggling to sustain their economic growth.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this budget is underpinned by innovative, bold and sensible strategies and actions for the transformation of the economic landscape of Mauritius such as –

- a) boosting investment;
- b) poverty alleviation;
- c) improving disaster and risk management, and
- d) sustainable development and green initiative.

Development cannot be achieved at the expense of the people. The motto of this Government has always been to ensure that nobody is left behind. To that effect, I welcome the consolidation of our Welfare State and the substantial increases in the various support schemes for poverty alleviation in the last two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, I am going to say a few words about my Ministry. Local Government, which serves a two-fold purpose, has a fundamental role in the implementation of these strategies and actions for the realisation of our shared goals. The first purpose is that of providing services, whereas the other is to represent and involve citizens in determining specific local public needs and how best these needs can be met.

In furtherance of the first objective, Local Authorities have been at the core of containing the COVID-19 crisis. They have played a key role in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic and provision of services during confinement period and even in the red zones. These services include: cleaning and disinfection programmes across the island, Mr Speaker, Sir, continuous provision of basic services such as scavenging services, street lighting and the provision of amenities used as vaccination centres.

However, now, Local Authorities must rise to the challenges ahead and drive future development in their respective jurisdiction by creating sustainable impact through the announced growth strategies.

To further enhance the services of Local Authorities, my Ministry is acquiring 17 tipper lorries and 7 lorries with crane for a total amount of Rs85 m. Same are expected to be delivered in July 2021. Additionally, 51 scavenging lorries, 10 lighting lorries, 2 vacuum road sweeper trucks which we did not have before, and 2 trucks mounted with jetting unit to

clean the drains are being acquired for an amount of Rs300 m., Mr Speaker, Sir. These assets will significantly modernise and enhance the services being provided to the population at large.

To enable the fulfilment of the second goal of the Local Government towards improving the quality of life of our citizens, Government has, over the last years, provided large amount of funds for the construction of various amenities. These include the construction and upgrading of roads, drains, market fairs, multipurpose complexes and sports facilities.

In November 2020, an additional amount of Rs1 billion was provided under the Economic Recovery Programme for additional projects. Some of which are obviously still in progress.

To pave the way for the materialisation of our objectives, we will not only maintain but increase our investment in these development projects, facilities and amenities. As such, I welcome the investment of an additional amount of Rs3 billion under the Economic Recovery Programme and Rs5.7 billion in community development projects, such as constructions of market fairs, sports amenities, health tracks, and traffic centres in all Local Authorities across the island. These projects will benefit our fellow citizens, thus bringing new and additional services closer to them whilst enhancing their quality and way of life.

It is to be noted that the following projects for an amount of Rs900 m. are currently at procurement stage and will kick-start hopefully within the next quarter of 2021 –

- a) the new market fair at Chemin Grenier;
- b) the renovation of Le Plaza Theatre – if everything goes alright;
- c) multipurpose complex at Abercrombie;
- d) sports centre at Plaine Verte;
- e) new market fair at Pamplemousses;
- f) headquarters of the District Council of Savanne, and
- g) multipurpose complex at Rivière du Rempart.

An additional amount of around Rs900 m. has been allocated in the next financial year to start the following new projects, just to name but a few –

- a) the Port Louis Theatre (Phase 2);

- b) renovation of Quorum Gymnasium;
- c) recreational park at Farquhar, Quatre Bornes;
- d) Traffic Centre at Bel Air;
- e) integrated sports amenities at Bassin, and
- f) gymnasium at Saint Felix and Stanley.

Mr Speaker, Sir, although we have been through periods of lockdown and partial confinement, Local Authorities have successfully implemented several major projects at a cost of Rs400 m. in the last few months. These are –

- a) administrative buildings for the District Council of Flacq and Pamplemousses;
- b) new market fair at Bel Air;
- c) leisure park at Quartier Militaire, and
- d) multipurpose complex at NHDC Complex, Geranium, Camp Levieux.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the Metro Express Project has given rise to opportunities for the redevelopment of strategically located areas in and around our city and towns into modern urban terminals.

Accordingly, with a view to uplifting and enhancing the image of our City/Town Centres, 6 modern Urban Terminals incorporating state-of-the-art architecture would be developed through private sector participation along the metro corridor from Port Louis to Curepipe. As a major transport interchange at the most strategic locations of the city and towns, the Urban Terminals are expected to be iconic buildings accommodating a mixed-use development, comprising of major amenities, commercial spaces, leisure and entertainment, markets, food courts, and dedicated hawker areas.

In addition to the potential for private investment to the tune of Rs10 billion, their contribution towards boosting employment in these areas is not to be underestimated. In this same breadth, we are witnessing the rapid progress of works at the Victoria Urban Terminal. The Phase 1 is expected to be completed by the end of this year, Phase 2, that is, the relocation of 1,000 hawkers, God willing, by March and April 2022 and Phase 3 that is, the final Phase, by November 2022.

In addition, the request for proposals for the Vacoas Urban Terminal Project is at evaluation stage and, it is expected that the implementation of the project would be

implemented in the forthcoming months. In the next few months, we are planning to launch the request for proposals for Quatre Bornes, Beau Bassin-Rose Hill and Curepipe.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with this initiative of transformation and modernisation, my Ministry has embarked on an array of digitisation projects and technological innovations, through the implementation of the Local Government 2.0 through the I-Council project across all Local Authorities.

The project comprises of a Council Project Management (CPM) System, Asset Management System, Geographical Information System and the Automatic Scavenging Monitoring System. Digitalisation and the streamlining of processes will foster better performance, enhance management efficiency and effectiveness as well as improve service delivery.

The I-Council project has already been implemented at the District Council of Moka and the District Council of Savanne. Four additional Councils will complete their project by the end of December 2021. We are aiming for all local authorities to be fully digitalised before the end of the Financial Year 2021-2022.

In the future, these systems would be integrated with the Citizen Support Portal to improve the effectiveness of complaint management at the level of Local Authorities as well, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This Budget also lays much emphasis on cleaning and embellishment and green energy. With regard to cleaning and embellishment, the setting up of a National Environment Cleaning Authority (NECA) with a seed funding of Rs100 m. is welcome. Local Authorities will also contribute positively to meet these targets. In this context, 6 plants for the composting of green market wastes will be constructed at strategic locations around the island.

It gives me satisfaction to announce that, the first Composting Plant – which one Member said has never started – which will be a Green Government Project will be set up at Henrietta and, as I have explained earlier, work has already progressed. We are just waiting for the EIA to complete the project.

In the same context, to optimise water conservation – as we know now to prevent droughts, sometime we get it during the year – as well as usage and to boost the development of Green Energy Industry, Government is currently working on new policies for a more effective, safe, efficient and sustainable construction of buildings.

In this respect, Government is planning to introduce rain water harvesting as a requirement for an application for Building and Land Use Permit. This measure aims at encouraging citizens to adopt water efficiency measures in any new construction.

I am going to say a few words about climate change. Given that Mauritius is part of the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), climate change and natural disasters pose a significant risk to the socio-economic development of our country. It is also a fact that the frequency of extreme weather, heavy rains and tropical cyclones has increased significantly over the last 2 decades. All these hazards, if not properly managed, can lead to disasters and even loss of lives as we have witnessed previously. The National Disaster and Risk Reduction Management Centre which plays a prominent role in the management and reduction of such risks has adopted the SENDAI Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and has shifted the country's policy from 'managing disasters' to 'managing and reducing disaster risks'.

In this context, 2 key reports and strategic plans have been prepared, namely –

- (a) the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Policy, Strategic Framework and Action Plan, with the support of the *Agence Française de Développement*; and
- (b) the Capacity Diagnosis Report on the disaster risk management system produced by the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) Partnership of the United Nations.

These documents provide the necessary policy guidance and a harmonised approach to further strengthen our resilience to increased risks due to climate change. They include some 225 strategic, tactical and operational recommendations to reduce the exposure and vulnerability of the population and the economy to disasters. To enhance our resilience further, the National Multi-Hazard Emergency Alert System will be implemented. The testing phase will start in September 2021 and the system will be fully operational by July 2022.

According to the World Risk Report 2020, these concerted actions and efforts, aiming at reducing risks and better managing disasters, have improved our ranking from 16th to 53rd, with an improved score. This improvement demonstrates that we are steering in the right direction in our endeavour to make Mauritius safer and more resilient.

So far in this calendar year, we have witnessed severe weather deterioration relatively late in the summer season with a climax during the second half of the month of April. We had

all witnessed how the southern and south-eastern parts of the island were severely impacted by heavy rainfall causing serious disruption to socio-economic activities.

On this note, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to quote the Former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, who once said, I quote –

“We are the first generation that can put an end to poverty and we are the last generation that can put an end to climate change. So, we must address this climate change issue.”

But, as I have mentioned above, as far as climate change is concerned, maybe we are already a bit too late. We may have already reached the tipping point, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Therefore, we cannot allow Mauritius to continue to remain a hostage with such extreme weather occurrences, because, Mr Speaker, Sir, during such period, the economy is stalled, and the lives of our countrymen as well as their livelihood are at stake.

This budget will further consolidate our strategy in the adoption of a concerted and sustainable approach to tackle the impacts of climate change such as flooding. To this effect, the Land Drainage Authority has carried out surveys using sophisticated electronic tools, such as the Digital Elevation Model where several areas have been identified and classified as flood prone areas and highly flood prone areas. To address the problem of flooding, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the first time in the history of Mauritius, an amount of Rs11.7 billion will be invested over a period of 3 years for a National Flood Management Programme with regards to the construction and upgrading of some 1,500 drain projects across the island. The most important point in that is that the LDA will integrate all the works done by the local authorities, NDU and RDA, to have a comprehensive drain network for the island. Previously what we were doing, Mr Speaker, Sir, the local authorities were doing the drains, the RDA was doing the drains, NDU was doing the drains separately and there was not much coordination. Now the LDA is going to coordinate that work and that is very important.

I feel sorry that some orators from the other side of the House have questioned the appropriateness of allocating this Rs11.7 billion to flood management. These same people – I am afraid – would be coming to complain in this House in case their constituency is adversely affected by severe floods in the future.

As far as the Mauritius Meteorological Services is concerned, we know, it plays a key role in assisting various persons and institutions, such as fishers and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Centre. In its endeavour to maintain a quality service, the

Mauritius Meteorological Services has improved its network of observation through additional automatic weather stations, automatic rain gauge stations and lightning detectors. These are contributing to more accurate weather forecasts and warning services.

With the contribution of the World Meteorological Organisation, the Mauritius Meteorological Services would be setting up a National Framework for Climate Services for Agriculture, Disaster Risk Reduction, Renewable Energy and Health sectors. In this respect, improved climate services would increase the capacity of the Republic of Mauritius to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As far as the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services which is engaged in the rescue and protection of life and property in the event of fires, road traffic accidents and other emergencies, also plays a paramount role in disaster and risk management. Moreover, to enhance its capabilities to respond to emergencies whilst reducing the response time, Government has approved the construction of new Fire Stations. A new Fire Station which has been constructed in Rose Belle is operational since July 2020. Bids for the construction of a Fire Station at Goodlands will be floated shortly, whereas the construction of new Fire Stations at Montagne Blanche and Quatre Bornes are at design stage.

The Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services has also embarked on a modernisation process of its fleet of vehicles and equipment. During this current Financial Year, the Fire Service will be further equipped with -

- 20 firefighting lorries, which are currently being manufactured in India;
- 1 aerial hydraulic ladder capable of operations at a height of 65 metres;
- 1 Hazmat vehicle, and
- 10 light utility vehicles

Furthermore, 13 trailers mounted high volume water pumps, which are used mainly during flooding, have already been manufactured in India and are currently being shipped to Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, fire safety is another important limb of risk management. However, it has been observed that the current paper-based process implemented by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services for the grant of a fire certificate is time consuming and inefficient. Thus, to do away with these cumbersome paper-based procedures, we will introduce an electronic

licensing system for the processing and issuance of fire certificates through the National Electronic Licensing System.

This system will enable online application, e-payment of fees and automated issuance of fire certificates in digital format. This will substantially decrease the processing time and accelerate delivery of certification services. This measure is in line with the business facilitation principles adopted by the Government for encouraging investment in the country.

An expert will be tasked to review the current policies, processes and legislations regarding the fire safety measures and granting of fire certificates. This exercise will be carried out with the collaboration of the Economic Development Board and will serve to rationalise our fire safety procedures in line with international standards.

Before concluding my speech, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to make a quick overview on the ongoing projects and those which will be implemented shortly in my Constituency, that is, No. 3 (Port-Louis East & Port-Louis Maritime). The objective is to uplift the quality of life of the inhabitants as well as the modernisation, construction of amenities in Constituency No. 3.

I bet it will be hard for some Members of the Opposition in my constituency to digest the fact that, this Government is investing so much in capital projects in Plaine Verte, Camp Yoloff and Roche Bois.

Just to mention a few, Mr Speaker, Sir –

- Renovation of the Dr. Idrice Goomany Municipal Centre, already started;
- The Flood Management Programme at Canal Anglais, Plaine Verte, Roche Bois, including Quartier Shell, is ongoing;
- Community Projects at Camp Yoloff and Rte Militaire;
- Two Area Health Centres; one at St François Xavier and one at Roche Bois. The one at St François started last week;
- Renovation of a cloakroom, fencing and parking area at Kaya Football ground, Mario Flore Children Playground and 01 February Gymnasium in Roche Bois;
- Upgrading works of the kindergarten at Roche Bois;
- A New Synthetic Football ground at Priest's Peak;
- Renovation of Kader Bhayat Swimming Pool in Plaine Verte, and

- Renovation of the roof of Ibrahim Abdoullah Market at Cité Martial.

Last but not the least, a New Plaine Verte Sports Arena to the tune of Rs151 m. right in the heart of Plaine Verte. The youth of Plaine Verte have been waiting for such a project for a long time. I am sure that you will all agree Plaine Verte is in need of these facilities. At long last, our young people can enjoy these world-class facilities.

This clearly shows the strong commitment and consideration that this Government is giving to Constituency No. 3, Plaine Verte, Camp Yoloff and Roche Bois.

On a concluding note, Mr Speaker, Sir, the role played by the local authorities, as partners, in supporting the economic development strategies are fully reckoned with.

This Budget also provides adequate resources to support planning, implementing and coordinating strategies to turnaround the economy and dynamise its progression into a sustainable manner. The Budget has all the ingredients that will enable our economic Recovery, trigger its Revival and strengthen its Resilience for the years to come.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, on this side of the House, fully endorse this Budget. Before ending, I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance for their caring attitude. Despite this difficult economic situation, they have found the ways and the means to support the population who have gone through such difficult times last year.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated! Hon. Ramful, please!

(3:45 p.m.)

Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Let me start by joining my voice, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to all those who have paid tribute to late Sir Anerood Jugnauth for his contribution to the country. But there is in the Budget Speech, unfortunately, one sentence that fits very awkwardly in the speech of the Minister and that according to him, this Budget exercise follows the philosophy of late Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

J'aurai eu honte, M. le président, de dire une telle chose à la place du ministre. Vous êtes en train d'endetter le pays, vous êtes en train de créer *what we call creative accounting, manipulating accounting* sur le déficit budgétaire. Vous gaspillez des fonds publics à tort et à

travers, on est fiché sur la liste noire de l'Union Européenne. La corruption, M. le président, fait ravage dans le pays. Ce matin, on a eu un PNQ sur la *State Trading Corporation*. La *State Trading Corporation*, M. le président, est devenue la *State Trading in Corruption*. La *State Trading in Corruption* !

On vend de la drogue partout dans le pays, l'indépendance de nos institutions et je cite la banque de Maurice, la banque de l'honorable Dr. Renganaden Padayachy. Et, vous mettez de côté les recommandations des instances internationales telles que le *World Bank* et vous dites à la population que c'est ça la philosophie de Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

Yesterday, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have had promotions in the public service. Junior officers have been promoted to the rank of SCE to the detriment of senior officers. And you want the civil servants to perform! *Ayez un peu de respect, M. le ministre!*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the advice of the World Bank is very clear if you look at the report of the World Bank through the eye of a perfect storm. The recommendation is clear that we cannot just rely on temporary support measures and wait for the crisis to be over. We have to address what they qualified as long festering challenges.

The World Bank, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, went further, they identified what are those structural challenges affecting our economy. In particular, they make mention of the fact that we have a growth trajectory which is increasingly driven on consumption and there is a decline in investment. The World Bank made mention of sustained loss in our overall export competitiveness, the World Bank makes mention of that thorny problem about aging population, causing friction in the labour market. And more importantly, the World Bank makes mention of continuous fiscal deficits combined with limited growth, resulting in a rise in the level of public debt to GDP.

And, there is one important observation that has been made by the World Bank, crucial observation and it needs to be told. It has to be said to the population because it concerns us, it concerns the whole population, and more importantly, it concerns the future generation and it is about the aging population. I am going to quote from what the World Bank said –

“The population aged 60 and older currently representing 16.8% of the total population, is expected to reach almost 25% by 2030, 30% by 2045 and 35% by 2058.”

And on the contrary, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the working-age population between 15 and 59, it is expected to fall from what is its current position, 65% of the population to 53% by 2058 with an absolute decline of about 45%.

Maintaining growth as the working age population declines has proven to be challenging in other rapidly aging countries causing pressure on the social protection system, etc., and in the light of these recommendations, from none other than the World Bank, at least we would have expected that a responsible hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development come up with measures to address structural challenges. *Il faut choisir la voie de la responsabilité au lieu de la voie de la popularité, M. le président.*

We were expecting him to tell us, on how he is going to reverse the trend of increasing growth on investment rather than taxing the consumers? How he will increase our export competitiveness? How he is going to tackle the impact of aging population on the labour market? And how, more importantly, he was going to reduce fiscal deficits and public debt? But, what does the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development does instead, he does the exact opposite. Continues to tax consumers with Rs2 on petroleum levy; increase debt - *419 milliards*; hiding away the real budget deficit by creating advances on future profits as revenue, etc. And when we take the Minister to task, when he is taken to task, you know what he does Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, so easy for him, he takes out the rabbit out of the hat and he says –

“well, COVID-19”

He puts the whole blame the back of COVID-19 but then, unfortunately, for him, he could not hold his mask for too long. Why? Because the World Bank in its Report unveiled the truth about the economic situation and I quote from the World Bank Report –

“The shocks of 2020 came at a time when serious structural cracks were beginning to appear in the foundation of Mauritius’ long-term growth model. Even prior to COVID-19 and other events of 2020, Mauritius was on an increasingly fragile development trajectory.”

So, the cracks were already there prior to COVID-19 and stop lying to the population. Now, what are those structural cracks, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Let me take the first one, public debt, GDP ratio was at 66.2% in 2019. Over the fiscal year 2019 to 2020, it reached to 83.4% prior to COVID-19 and for 2020 to 2021, it reached to an alarming rate of 95% and I will ask the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and other

Ministers: please do not try to defend the indefensible. Do not mislead the public by comparing us with other countries having high debt levels like Japan, like France, like India because firstly, these countries they have the capacity to pay back their debts and secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, most of them, they have their debts in their own domestic currencies. Japan holds 90% of its debts in the Japanese Yen and here in Mauritius, *108 milliards* out of the *419 milliards* are held in foreign currencies and with depreciation of the Rupee, that is going to cost us even more. So stop fooling the people and let us not lie to the people by saying that the debt level is because of COVID-19 again, the rabbit in the bag, COVID-19. Let me refer to what the Director of Audit said in his last report for Financial Year 2019-2020, again prior to COVID-19, and I quote –

“Government has been highly dependent on borrowings to finance its expenditure during the past few financial years. Borrowings ranked second as a source of Government revenue. In financial year 2019 to 2020, borrowings have increased considerably from Rs27.8 billion to Rs56.9 billion, and represented”

You know how, the percentage, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? It represented –

“some 32 per cent of total revenue.”

Even Moody's; some hon. Members have made mention of Moody's. When you read the Moody's Report, it says –

“Mauritius's credit weaknesses include a relatively high government debt burden”.

So, all these independent experts are saying we have a problem with our debt and why are we blaming Government for that? Because some people might say, well, we are in a crisis and that is the norm. We are blaming Government for this situation because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, countries that have a sustainable public debt, they are able to borrow further to help their population in these difficult times. We borrow, we keep and we control our public debt so that we can face a crisis but, if you enter the crisis with a high public debt, *votre marge de manœuvre est limitée* and this is why you will see out of the 147 billion, *R 147 milliards*, earmarked for COVID-19 response measures, *23.5 milliards* only were spent for Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme. Therefore, *147 milliards* represented 32% of GDP out of which only 5% of GDP were spent on these two items and now, we are told that these measures will be closed, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development will close the tap, except for those in the tourism sector. We also blame Government for this high level of debt because due to fiscal pressure, the Minister of

Finance, Economic Planning and Development has, once more, had to resort to taxing the consumers. Some hon. Members have already said it, our tax is estimated to increase from 82 *milliards* to 110 *milliards* for this Financial Year and also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, more importantly we blame the MSM-led Government because since 2014, we have been financing a number of unproductive public investment projects and wasting public funds. Let me take a few examples, 1 *milliard à travers la STC* given to *petit copain* under the Emergency Procurement en plein COVID-19, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. 5 *milliards pour le Multipurpose Complex* at Côte d'Or *baptisé stade fantôme*, a living example of wasted public investment projects. Now, we are told that they are going to construct a 50-storey building in Côte d'Or, World Trade Centre. 19 *milliards* Metro Express project.

Now, I agree Metro Express is going to change the landscape of part of the country, but it is also going to change our fiscal landscape, *parce que M. le président, ce projet est devenu un 'trou sans fond'*. We can see in this Budget, a sum of R 1.7 *milliards* has been earmarked as loan for the Metro Express Ltd! And for how long, this we were not told before. For how long is Government going to subsidise Metro Express Ltd, and now, we are told that R 4.7 *milliards* have been earmarked for the extension to Réduit.

Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea talked about the Safe City Project. R 19 *milliards*! The project was criticised by the Director of Audit. For the first time, a public entity none other than the Office of the Commissioner of Police refusing to hand over documents to the Director of Audit! We have spent R 19 *milliards* on 4,000 cameras, and now we are told that these cameras can only store footages for 30 days. Only 30 days, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! The murderer of Mr Kistnen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is still at large today. And we are told that the Safe City cameras at La Louise could only store footage for 30 days and we are told that these cameras are going to help us to detect crimes! These cameras that have cost public funds R 19 *milliards* will store footages for only 30 days! And recently, R 11.9 *milliards de gaspillage*, of public money to NPFL and NIC to cover for the mishandling by Government of the dismantling of ex-BAI and Bramer Bank! Et pour couronner le tout, M. le président, this week, the judgement of the Privy Council in the Betamax case, Government has to pay Rs6 billion of public money to cover for the cost of political vendetta - political vendetta! - against Betamax, et ils ont l'audace, M. le président de nous traiter de prophètes de malheur, que nous sommes des demagogues! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have children living in this country aswell; we are also concerned about the future of this country. We are also concerned

about the youth of this country and this is why we are blaming Government, because we have good reasons to do so, and we will continue to do so in the interest of the population.

Let me come to the Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC). This has been in the Press, that the Central Bank should relinquish ownership of the MIC and financing of MIC should be provided through the budgetary process as advised by the IMF. And there is a reason, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why the IMF has said so, because through the budgetary process, there is more transparency, there is accountability. We can put questions in the House on those projects, about the financing of those projects. If you go on the website of the MIC, we can see that, as at 10 June, projects to the tune of nearly Rs17 billions have been approved, out of which Rs3,750,000,000 have been disbursed already, public money, and we cannot put any question. The public is not aware whether these projects are going to be feasible or not; they have no idea. And when we put questions to the Minister of Finance, he refused to answer to any of those PQs, relying on the Clause of Confidentiality in the Bank of Mauritius Act, and this despite the assurances given by the Governor General of the BOM himself in a Press conference on 29 May 2020. Do you know what he said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, he said, ‘transparency, good governance and independence will be the bywords of the MIC.’ *La transparence sera le maître-mot de la MIC.* The Governor General of the bank said so in his statement on 29 June 2020, and now, when we put questions to the Minister, he refuses to answer any question; and the Governor General went on to say that the MIC will be run within a strict governance structure. And in line with international norms, the observation of the IMF is a real smack in the face of Government. A real smack! But it would seem that the smack in the face was not resounding enough, because you know why, now MIC is going to invest into Smart City, MIC is going to purchase land from Mon Trésor Smart City Ltd, 184 hectares of land under sugarcane cultivation; some found in the Constituency of the Minister of Finance, *s'il vous plaît!*

Hon. Members: Hummm!

Mr Ramful: And these lands have been upgraded because of the Smart City Certificate *depuis 2016*, with no infrastructure, purchased to the tune of *R 4.5 milliards*. R 10 millions par arpent, *s'il vous plaît!* Land under cane cultivation purchased by MIC! And what about the sugarcane growers, the small planters? What about them? They are also facing difficulty; they are also affected by COVID. Where is the long-awaited reform in the sugarcane sector? Where is the Report of the World Bank which has already been handed over to Government? Where are the recommendations of the Report? Why has it not been

made public? *R 25,000 pour une tonne de sucre!* But the planters are asking – is the price of Rs3,300 per tonne of sugar for bagasse going to be included in that Rs25,000? The price for molasses, is that also going to be included in that Rs25,000? The price for other by-products, is that also going to be included? If they are going to be included, then, it's but peanuts! If the R 25,000 include *tout ça, mais ce n'est pas la peine. Le problème reste entier pour les petits planteurs, M. le président.*

Let me go on the Financial Services. We know that *depuis février 2020*, Mauritius has been on the grey list of the FATF; *depuis mai 2020*, we have been on the blacklist of the European Commission, we have been on the blacklist together with Ghana, and on 01 January 2021, following Brexit, UK also included us on its stand-alone blacklist, and we have, since then, been struggling to get Mauritius off the blacklist. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what do we see, a few days ago, the State Bank of Mauritius whose majority shareholder is Government, controlled by Government and the Chairman of its holding company, appointed by Government; Mr Sattar Haji Abdullah, refusing to comply with the disclosure order issued by ICAC on suspicious cases of money laundering to the tune of *R 27 milliards* and the Supreme Court had to intervene to order the bank to comply. *Une banque contrôlée par l'État, refusant de se soumettre à l'ICAC* and you want the EU to get us off the list!

(Interruptions)

Alvaro Sobrinho! So many questions had been raised about the source of funds. This has tarnished our image and we do not know where the investigation, *c'est bête de poser la question.* We do not even know but then, recently, in the Press, we hear the former adviser of the Prime Minister, Mr Gérard Sanspeur, in Weekend Newspaper, he was asked why did he leave the PMO, and you know what was his answer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I am going to quote from what he said –

« C'est l'affaire Sobrinho. C'est l'affaire Sobrinho qui a été la goutte d'eau. Il fallait laisser Sobrinho acquérir des villas dans une IRS et ce n'était pas légal. »

Former adviser to the Prime Minister's Office, *que ce n'était pas légal ! J'ai mis dans le contrat une condition que Sobrinho ne pouvait pas remplir.* And you know what that condition was? And this is what the Opposition has been saying *depuis le premier jour, donnez les détails de la provenance de chaque roupie qu'il allait investir à Maurice. Sobrinho n'a pas pu remplir la condition, ce qui a rendu furieux*, you know who? The Prime Minister! *Son entourage et le gouvernement, un* former adviser to the Prime Minister's Office

making such allegations and till today, there has been no official denial of this, of what the former adviser said.

I would not go into the measures that have been announced in the budget *concernant le* financial services sector.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Let him speak.

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Order! Order! Hon. Minister! Hon. Assirvaden!

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Members!

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Ramful was making...

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Order everyone!

(*Interruptions*)

Hon. Ramful was making a good speech. There's a point of order. Let him! Carry on!

Mr Ramful: If you look at the measures, *c'est du réchauffé*. Financial Crime Commission *depuis 2015, on annonce la création de* la Financial Crime Commission, etc., etc. Digital currency, *2 ou 3 fois dans les* previous budgets, *on a annoncé tout ça*. But, anyway, let me come to the gambling sector, *plus intéressant que tout*.

Gambling sector! Three reports! The Commission of Enquiry on Horse Racing en 2015 the Pari Report. The Commission of Enquiry on Drugs in 2018! The Lam Shang Leen Report! The Report of the National Risk Assessment en 2019 by the Ministry! All these Reports lead to one conclusion, that gambling is home for money launderers. *Clair! Et on dit ça depuis 2015*. What has Government done so far? I have heard not a single measure in this Budget to address this problem. Nothing has been done to enhance transparency on the identity of horse owners and shareholders as well as their sources of funds.

*Vous savez, M. le président, en 2017-18 le précédent budget, Government has announced to ban cash betting transactions above Rs2000 and proposed to introduce an account based betting with player card program system. In order *soi-disant* to increase audit trail on betting activities. Jusqu'à présent, cette mesure est demeurée lettre morte, jusqu'à présent, M. le président! And what about the role of the GRA, I think hon. Bhagwan said it. The former Integrity and Compliance Officer, Paul Beeby, said in a Press interview of *Le Mauricien* of 01 June. You know what he said?*

« Beekharry wanted one thing and that was to destroy the MTC ».

C'est tout. He wanted only to destroy the MTC, allow corruption, allow money laundering.

Mr Deputy Speaker, before I conclude, I will conclude on the Betamax case but I need to answer two hon. Ministers, hon. Teeluck, Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage and my good friend, hon. Toussaint from my constituency.

(Interruptions)

No, hon. Toussaint from my constituency.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Teeluck said, *j'ai été touché par ce qu'il a dit.* This is why I said I must tell him. He said during the lockdown, he went to distribute food packs to his constituents, and he asked us, what were we doing, *les membres de l'Opposition.* You refused us Work Access Permit!

(Interruptions)

You prevented us to go and meet our constituents in our constituencies and you were asking where we were. You wanted us to be sequestered in our home. That is what you wanted.

And, secondly, when you were distributing food packs paid from public funds, we distributed packs from our own pocket.

M. l'honorable ministre du Sport, je dois dire qu'il a fait un bon discours. Je dois le féliciter, l'honorable ministre du Sport, l'honorable Toussaint. Mais il m'a demandé de lui remercier pour les projets qui ont été faits dans notre circonscription. Mais, M. le président, je prends note que encore une fois la circonscription Mahébourg/Plaine Magnien est restée l'enfant pauvre du budget. On avait promis plusieurs années de cela, que Mahébourg allait devenir un village touristique. Que l'EDB allait aider au développement économique de la

région. Mais pas un seul mot, M. le ministre du Sport ! Pas un seul mot dans le budget ! Et maintenant pour me demander de vous remercier pour des projets fantômes, c'est un peu de l'hystérie.

Now, let me just finish. I am finishing on Betamax. You know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a lot has been said about Betamax and this case has been through arbitration, through the Supreme Court, it has finally ended up before the Law Lords of the Privy Council *donnant gain de cause à Betamax*. And I must say this that we respect the opinions of all judges, be it the judges of the Supreme Court, be it the Arbitrator, be it the Law Lords before the Privy Council, we respect all their opinions and this is the beauty of our legal system. Everyone has their own interpretation about the law. *Et c'est comme ça que* a democracy works, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. *Mais, M. le président*, imagine just for one minute, just for one minute, Betamax had lost its case before the Privy Council, *qu'est-ce que les membres du gouvernement allaient faire ? Ils allaient enflammer l'hémicycle*.

Do you know why I say that? Because I do not want to embarrass the hon. Prime Minister. I will ask him to go and read what he said before this House on 24 June 2019, following the Judgement of the Supreme Court in the Betamax case.

Ils avaient fait de la politique de bas étage contre le Parti travailliste et contre son Leader, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam. I am going to ask him to go and read what he said. *Mais seulement, je veux juste citer quelques lignes de son discours* and I will finish on this. He said and I quote –

“I do not want to foresee what will happen in the future, but I speak as a lawyer, Madam Speaker. – At that time we had *notre chère* Mrs Maya Hanoomanjee - I have looked at the judgment of the Privy Council of the CT Power, - because we had the judgment of the CT Power - and I was discussing that with the hon. Deputy Prime Minister – who was hon. Ivan Collendavelloo -. I shall only say this. We can clearly see the thinking of the Privy Council on issues like favouring a party with regard to using public funds for a contract. I shall just leave it at that and then time will tell and we will see how this case will end up.”

It has ended up, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It has ended up, unfortunately, with the taxpayers having to pay Rs6 billion from public funds.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Seeruttun!

(4.22 p.m.)

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr M. Seeruttun):

Merci M. le président. Permettez-moi d'abord, M. le président, de me joindre à tous ceux qui ont rendu un hommage...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Seeruttun: ... à cette grande personnalité de notre République, qui est connue comme le père du miracle économique mauricien et l'architecte de l'île Maurice moderne. Je parle bien sûre de feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth. M. le président, il disait toujours et je cite –

“I am a simple man and I live a simple life.”

Ce que je retiens de ce grand tribun, c'est que même s'il a côtoyé les plus grands hommes et femmes de ce monde, il est resté humble, un vrai patriote, qui a su œuvrer pour la transformation et l'avancement de son pays tout en restant près de son peuple pendant les 60 ans qu'il a consacrés à sa patrie. M. le président, qui d'autres auraient pu tenir tête au diktat du FMI à un moment où le pays était à genoux ? Mais Sir Anerood Jugnauth l'avait fait. Contrairement aux autres, il l'avait fait parce qu'il voulait protéger son peuple. Chapeau à notre Rambo national.

Toutes mes condoléances vont au Premier ministre, à ses proches et surtout à Lady Jugnauth qui a toujours été aux côtés de Sir Anerood Jugnauth mais sans jamais lui faire de l'ombre. Courage Lady. Le pays dans son ensemble vous soutient, ainsi que votre famille, pendant cette période de deuil.

M. le président, vendredi dernier, le ministre des Finances a prononcé son deuxième discours budgétaire, toujours dans un contexte mondial et local sans précédent sous l'impact de la pandémie de la Covid-19. Malgré ce contexte difficile, M. le président, il est parvenu à proposer des mesures qui répondent aux attentes à la fois –

- (a) des opérateurs économiques, petits et gros,
- (b) des groupes vulnérables,
- (c) les gens de la classe moyenne,
- (d) la cause environnementale,
- (e) les planteurs,
- (f) des éleveurs,

- (g) des pêcheurs,
- (h) des sportifs,
- (i) des étudiants,
- (j) ceux souffrant des incontinences,
- (k) des jeunes filles et j'en passe.

M. le président, j'ai écouté avec attention les intervenants qui se sont exprimés avant moi et quand j'écoute ceux de l'opposition, j'ai l'impression qu'ils vivent aux pays des merveilles et que la pandémie de la COVID-19 n'a été qu'un mauvais rêve, M. le président. Pour eux, nous vivons dans des conditions idéales et *it is business as usual*. Alors que le monde subit la pire des catastrophes de l'après-guerre.

M. le président, le ministre des Finances, a, dans son budget, insufflé un sens de responsabilité, tout en privilégiant une reprise économique tant attendue par tout le monde et surtout les entrepreneurs. Or, M. le président, la réaction des membres de l'opposition est restée la même. D'ailleurs, je disais déjà à certains de mes collègues, le vendredi matin avant la présentation du Budget ce qu'allait être la réaction de ceux de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Je leurs disais qu'ils allaient qualifier ce Budget de décevant et de Budget raté. Bien sûr que l'honorable Bobby Hurreeram s'en souviendrait. Bien sûr, ils m'ont demandé comment je peux anticiper leurs réactions, M. le président. Je leurs ai répondu que cela a été le cas depuis 1983. Et je ne me suis pas trompé, M. le président. Et pourtant, malgré des budgets décevants et ratés, décrit par cette même opposition, le pays a connu le miracle économique et ces dernières années, l'avant COVID-19, on a connu une baisse dans le taux de chômage. On est monté en rang par rapport à *Ease of doing Business*. Le pays est sorti, de ce qu'on appelle le *middle income trap* pour passer à un pays à revenu élevé. On a introduit le *Minimum Wage*.

M. le président, avant 2014, on faisait tout pour pouvoir augmenter l'arrivée des touristes à Maurice. Et on n'avait jamais dépassé le seuil d'un million. Depuis 2015, les arrivées touristiques ont augmenté pour frôler les 1.4 millions en 2019. On a augmenté la pension des retraitées. Il y a eu la signature des accords de libre-échange avec la Chine, avec l'Inde et avec le continent Africain. Nos réserves ont augmenté pour passer à 18 mois de notre besoin d'importation. Et, j'en passe. Imaginez seulement s'ils avaient contribué positivement dans cet élan de faire développer l'île Maurice, où on serait aujourd'hui.

Mais ils ont adopté cette attitude négative donc, je laisse le peuple tirer leurs propres jugements. Malheureusement, M. le président, l'année dernière la pandémie de la Covid-19 a mis le monde à l'arrêt, l'île Maurice n'a pas été épargnée.

Depuis décembre 2014, l'Opposition a passé son temps à critiquer mais n'est jamais venue avec des propositions concrètes, réfléchies et réalistes. D'ailleurs, par rapport aux vaccins contre la Covid-19, les membres de l'Opposition continuent à dire qu'il fallait précommander les vaccins avant même la sortie des vaccins mais je pose la question combien de vaccins, de Pfizer ou de Moderna on aurait pu avoir aujourd'hui, connaissant l'embargo qui a été imposé par les pays producteurs quant à leurs livraisons.

M. le président, l'Opposition nous critiquent sur les indicateurs économiques et comme je disais plus tôt, l'Opposition prétend que nous sommes dans une situation normale et ils font référence aux rapports du FMI, de la Banque Mondiale entre autres. Mais ce que je trouve un peu malhonnête de leurs parts, ils donnent beaucoup de crédibilité à ses rapports, mais ces mêmes rapports parlent de succès de Maurice, dans la manière on a géré la pandémie. Et eux, qui donnent autant de l'attention à ces rapports, disent que la gestion de cette crise sanitaire à Maurice a été un échec. Mais, M. le président, *which is which*? C'est pour dire à quel point ils sont désespérés pour faire de la politique politicaille sur un sujet aussi sérieux que cette pandémie. M. le président,

Concernant la dette, c'est claire qu'elle est à un niveau élevée, M. le président, on est tous d'accord dessus mais, je fais aussi référence à ce qui est dit dans ce rapport – le rapport demande qu'on vienne avec des mesures afin de ramener la dette à un niveau acceptable dans le moyen terme, M. le président.

C'est ce que justement ce budget entreprend de faire; c'est-à-dire de ramener la dette de 95% par rapport au PIB à 80% d'ici 2025 et à 70% d'ici fin juin 2030. Tout à l'heure-là, l'honorable Ramful parlait du Japon, de l'Inde, aujourd'hui tous ces grands pays développés, leurs niveaux de dettes sont très élevés. Je prends le rapport du FMI par exemple, le Japon est au *top* de la liste, suivis d'autres pays comme l'Allemagne, les Etats-Unis, la France et le Singapour. D'ailleurs, le Singapour privilégie la dette pour continuer à faire développer son pays et moderniser son pays.

Avec raison, l'honorable Ivan Collendavelloo parlait lors de son intervention, il y a des pays comme l'Afghanistan et Zimbabwe, qui ont un taux de dette très bas. Mais, est-ce pour autant ces pays sont en train de faire mieux que nous ? Alors, dans un moment où la

situation est telle, il faut s'assurer qu'on gère cette crise sanitaire, qui n'était pas prévue, parce qu'on disait qu'avec cette crise sanitaire, ça va emmener une crise économique et par la suite une crise sociale. Alors, on n'aurait rien fait et attendre que les choses se redressent par elles-mêmes, laisser mourir notre peuple et amener une situation pour ne plus gérer la paix sociale dans ce pays? Mais non, M. le président.

Ici, on nous critique sur la dette et je parlais de ces grands pays où le niveau de la dette dépasse les 100 % du PIB. Est-ce que vous entendez cette même virulence des membres de l'Opposition de ces pays? Non, M. le président! L'Opposition de ces pays est d'une trempe différente complètement parce que la situation est telle que c'est acceptable et aussi c'est acceptée par les institutions internationales et donc, aujourd'hui la dette est à un niveau qu'on comprend est élevé, mais pour pourvoir corrigé la situation, ce budget, justement, met l'emphase sur la reprise économique pour justement renverser la décroissance et la projection de croissance faite pour l'année financière 2021/2022 est de 9 %.

Il fallait qu'on envoie un signal fort et positif et c'est justement ce que ce budget envoie comme message, M. le président et d'ailleurs, on le sent déjà parmi les opérateurs économiques un *feel good factor* parce qu'on sait quand il y a la confiance, il y a l'investissement et de facto suit la croissance de la richesse et bien sûr, la création de l'emploi.

Le budget mentionne une croissance de 9% pour l'exercice financier 2021/2022 et en même temps avec la réouverture de nos frontières, on projette une arrivée de 650,000 touristes. Et là, l'Opposition met en doute ces chiffres. Je me pose la question sur quoi elle se base pour contester ces chiffres? Parce qu'on sait, M. le président, les chiffres qui sont mentionnés dans le discours du budget, ont été travaillés par les techniciens du ministère des Finances et aussi par les acteurs du tourisme comprenant aussi bien sûr les cadres de la MTPA. Donc, ce n'est pas comme si un chiffre jeté comme ça, irréfléchi et c'est du sérieux, M. le président.

Il y a parmi dans les rangs de l'Opposition, des anciens ministres des Finances, ils ont travaillé avec ces cadres du ministère des Finances. Est-ce qu'ils pensent que c'est l'honorable ministre qui vient avec des chiffres pareils? Donc, encore une fois, ça montre un manque de sérieux de la part des membres de l'Opposition.

D'un côté ils disent que la dette est trop élevée, de l'autre côté ils sont d'accord qu'il faut soutenir la population dans une période de crise et ils disent qu'il ne faut pas augmenter

la taxe. Mais alors quoi faire ? Comment faire pour trouver les moyens pour essayer de soulager la population qui est en train de souffrir de cette pandémie ? Peut-être, passer un panier...

(*Interruptions*)

M. le président, l'année dernière, tout le monde était unanime à dire que dans des moments difficiles, comme on dit, au grand maux les grands remèdes. Même le leader de l'Opposition avait dit qu'on n'avait pas de choix, il faut trouver des moyens pour financer les dépenses de l'État. D'autres économistes respectés ont dit qu'il faut trouver tout ce qui est possible comme solution pour adresser le problème qu'on est en train de faire face. Donc, c'est ce que justement le ministre des Finances, le gouvernement a fait, M. le président.

Aujourd'hui, on critique pourquoi on a pris les réserves de la Banque de Maurice, on parle de sa solvabilité ; on traite comme si la Banque de Maurice est une compagnie qui est régie par le *Companies Act*. Mais non, la Banque de Maurice est régie par le *Bank of Mauritius Act*. Il y a des choses qui sont claires, que peut-elle faire et que peut-elle ne pas faire. D'ailleurs, le FMI n'a pas critiqué ce qui a été fait. Non, non ! C'était dans des situations difficiles et exceptionnelles qu'on a eu à avoir recours à la Banque de Maurice pour venir en aide et soutenir le peuple ; le monde, comme on sait, passe par des moments sans précédent, M. le président.

Il y a eu aussi des membres de l'Opposition qui ont parlé de la cherté de la vie. Encore une fois, la situation est telle que la production mondiale des différents produits, surtout les produits alimentaires, a baissé, une cause directe de la pandémie.

J'ai à côté de moi le ministre de l'Agro-industrie. On n'a qu'à voir les chiffres qui ont chuté dans le monde entier. Et, comme on importe beaucoup de produits pour le besoin de la consommation alimentaire, quand il y a une baisse dans la production, le prix augmente. Il y a ça et aussi le fret qui a augmenté. Il est vrai aussi qu'avec l'économie qui a souffert, il y a eu une baisse dans les entrées de devises, tels que le dollar, l'euro, qui ont apprécié par rapport à la roupie. Tout cela combiné, cela a un impact direct sur le prix des produits importés. Mais qu'a-t-on fait, M. le président, pour soulager un peu l'impact de ces augmentations dans les prix afin qu'on puisse soulager dans une certaine mesure la population ? Donc, le budget vient avec une série de mesures justement pour soulager les problèmes que doivent faire face la population, tels que –

- i. Les planteurs de la canne, les planteurs de thé avec une subvention du R 10,000 aux coopératives pour l'achat de moissonneuses ;
- ii. Le *Bad Weather Allowance* a été augmenté de R 425 à R 475 ;
- iii. Une aide financière annuelle de R 2,500 à quelque 1,800 pêcheurs ;
- iv. Des prêts accordés aux pêcheurs à des taux très faibles ;
- v. Pour ceux qui vont construire une maison, ça aussi, parce qu'on parle aussi du coût de la construction qui a augmenté sensiblement, et là, le ministre des Finances annonce un remboursement de 5 % sur le coût de l'acquisition d'un terrain ou la construction d'une résidence ;
- vi. Par rapport à des personnes handicapées, il y a une augmentation ;
- vii. La pension mensuelle pour les orphelins passe à R 8,000 ;
- viii. Les subsides sur le riz et la farine ont été maintenue afin qu'il n'y ait pas un effet sur le prix du pain et les autres produits à base de farine ;
- ix. Pour les étudiants, les frais d'examen de la MIDT ont été exemptés ;
- x. Pour les jeunes filles en Grades 6 à 13, elles auront droit à des serviettes hygiéniques gratuitement, et
- xi. Des lunettes de vue sans frais, encore une fois, pour les enfants jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans.

Il y a une série de mesures aussi bien pour les éleveurs de bétail ; la subvention sur les aliments a doublé. À mon époque, c'était à R 2, ça avait augmenté à R 4, et là, on augmente de R 4 pour passer à R 8 le kilo. Tout ça, c'est pour montrer les efforts qu'on est en train de faire pour atténuer au moins l'impact de cette augmentation des produits, des commodités, M. le président.

Tout à l'heure, j'ai écouté attentivement l'intervention de l'honorable Ramful. Il faisait référence à des interviews de M. Sanspeur. J'ai comme l'impression qu'il a passé son temps à lire les interviews dans des journaux sans pour autant lire ce qu'il y a dans ce document, M. le président, parce qu'il n'a rien trouver dedans, il a parlé d'autres choses, sauf les mesures qui sont annoncées dans le budget. Il y a eu d'autres remarques faites par certains membres de l'Opposition. Je prends aussi notre ancien collègue, ancien ministre, notre ami l'honorable Bodha. Voilà quelqu'un qui disait toujours, jusqu'à la veille de son départ du

gouvernement, que le MSM est un parti de bâtisseurs. Vous savez, M. le président, deux jours avant son départ du gouvernement, il a animé un régional dans ma circonscription et il a parlé beaucoup de projets du gouvernement, qu'on allait changer le paysage de l'île Maurice et le travail qu'on est en train d'abattre pour améliorer le sort de tous les Mauriciens. Et vous savez ce que les gens m'ont dit, ceux présents dans cette réunion, après son départ, ils m'ont dit : '*b ki valer ena so parol zordi*'.

(*Interruptions*)

Alors, du jour au lendemain, rien ne va et il propose un projet de société pour l'île Maurice. Du jour au lendemain rien ne va. Et il propose un projet de société pour l'île Maurice. La question que je lui pose, il dit aussi qu'il faut rassembler des personnes intègres pour pouvoir, n'est-ce pas, créer ce qu'on appelle *paradigm shift* et avoir une île Maurice moderne.

Je sais que son proche collaborateur, son conseiller même, fait partie aussi de cette équipe économique de cette Alliance de l'Espoir ou de désespoir, je ne sais pas. Mais on parle de personnes intègres, voilà une personne qui a été appelée à prendre une responsabilité dans une institution importante, comme président; qui s'est octroyé lui-même des priviléges qu'il n'avait pas droit. Qui a été complètement à l'encontre de ce qu'on appelle pratique de la bonne gouvernance. Et il a fallu à mon ministère mener une enquête pour pouvoir démontrer que cette pratique n'était pas acceptable. Il a fallu demander à la personne de partir et de rembourser la somme qu'elle avait empochée. Ça a été remboursé finalement. Parce qu'elle avait fait de la résistance au départ.

Voilà une personne qui, pour moi, avait été critiquée dans la manière qu'elle gérait les fonds d'une institution gouvernementale qui est un associé très proche de l'honorable Bodha, qui fait partie aussi de ce comité pour venir proposer des solutions pour une île Maurice meilleure, est aujourd'hui dans l'entourage de M. Bodha dont il parle des personnes intègres. Donc, avant de faire des critiques, essayez de voir autour de vous et après nettoyez votre entourage et après venir donner des leçons aux autres. M. le président, on parle beaucoup de Betamax depuis quelques jours et là, encore une fois, j'entends l'honorable Ramful. Et hier je crois c'était l'honorable Assirvaden. Pour moi ce sont les dernières personnes à pouvoir venir parler sur l'affaire Betamax.

Moi, je demanderais à ces messieurs et aussi aux autres qui vont parler sur l'affaire Betamax d'aller lire d'abord le jugement des trois juges de la Cour Suprême sur cette affaire. Allez lire et voir dans quels circonstances et comment ce contrat a été alloué.

Ce matin, l'honorable Leader de l'opposition, a parlé du moins une partie de ce qui s'est passé avant la signature de ce contrat en 2009. Comment lui, en tant qu'un *Senior Minister* dans ce gouvernement dirigé par le Dr. Ramgoolam; comment entre eux, collègues, ministres, ils se bagarraient. Ils n'arrivaient pas à tomber d'accord s'il fallait allouer ce contrat ou pas, et que finalement, il fallait mettre sur pied un comité avec quelques membres du gouvernement, des ministres, pour voir si vraiment il fallait allouer ce contrat à Betamax. Et il disait, lui en tant que *Senior Minister*, il était appelé à présider ce comité et même dans ce petit comité, ils n'arrivaient pas à tomber d'accord et proposer une solution. Alors, fidèle à son habitude, il dit 'je ne vais pas prendre des décisions, allons demander à une firme indépendante de venir avec des propositions'. Et le même leader de l'opposition dit qu'avant même que la firme indépendante soumet son rapport, le contrat était signé. Ce n'est pas moi qui dis ça ! Voilà !

Je vois que lors de sa *PNQ*, il vient demander qu'une Commission d'Enquête soit faite pour faire la lumière sur toute cette saga de Betamax. Je vois que le MMM aussi soutient cette démarche. Par contre, je vois que l'honorable Boolell et les autres du Parti travailliste sont contre.

An hon. Member: Pas question !

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: *Atan repons Soodhun!*

Mr Seeruttun: Donc, M. le président, pour moi il y a une question fondamentale. Qui a commis le crime? Est-ce celui qui a donné le contrat pour protéger un petit groupe au détriment de la population ou bien celui qui a cassé le contrat...

(*Interruptions*)

... pour protéger la population au détriment de ce petit groupe?

(*Interruptions*)

An. hon. Member: *Al reflessi twa!*

Mr Seeruttun: A vous de réfléchir !

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Toussaint: 5 milliards de ce gouvernement !

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: *Twa kinn signe contra la! Twa kinn signe!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Allow the Minister to continue, please! Continue Minister!

Mr Seeruttun: M. le président...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Seeruttun:... ils parlent sur le budget, et je vois qu'ils reviennent avec les mêmes arguments, la dette, la cherté de la vie et rien d'autre. Moi, je vais m'en tenir à la réaction des experts et des personnes indépendantes et je vais citer quelques-uns. Je commence par la firme EY, qui avait ceci à dire, et je cite –

« Minister Padayachy resisted the temptation to balance his budget for the next fiscal year, accepting a deficit of 5.6% for the year ending 2021 while giving a no-tax-budget. This alone goes towards restoring confidence, critical to boosting investment and consumer spending. He continues, the vast infrastructural projects engaged in the last few years announcing Rs65 billions of expenditure over the next three years. He does not compromise on the welfare state keeping generous measures previously taken. »

M. le président, la firme Andersen avait ceci à dire, et je cite –

« In his much anticipated second budget, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development set the tone for a stronger and more resilient future for the country. In many ways, it felt like the dawn of a new era, one where Mauritius will have to reinvent itself in order to achieve sustainable growth in the post-COVID world. »

La firme KPMG parle du budget en ces termes et je cite –

“Compared to last year, this Budget Speech enables a more positive outlook with the availability of vaccines. The budget measures long for recovery, revival and resilience in the expectation of vaccination being the game changer amidst prospects of strong recovery, globally.

The measures centred around an ongoing economic agenda resting on three main pillars being: a boost to investment, shaping a new economic architecture and restoring confidence.

Key to this are massive investments in public infrastructure, strengthening social protection and opening up of the economy”

Le président de *Business Mauritius*, M. Vidia Mooneegan avait ceci à dire, et je cite -

« C'est un budget de relance qui mise sur la croissance plutôt que l'austérité. Les mesures annoncées ramèneront la confiance et donneront une nouvelle impulsion à l'investissement privé. »

Il y a eu d'autres réactions, M. le président, comme, par exemple, madame Marina Ythier-Jacobs (Entrepreneure) –

« Un Budget avec des mesures courageuses »

M. André Bonieux (CEO, Alteo) –

« Il nous a surpris avec un *No Tax Budget*»

M. Gheereesing Gopaul (*Mauritius Library Association*) –

« Un budget historique »

M. Arvind Nilmadhub (Economiste) –

« Le ministre a bien fait son exercice»

M. Radhakrishna Sadien (syndicaliste) –

« Il y a des points positifs dans ce budget »

M. Jean-Michel Pitot (AHRIM) –

« Une bonne nouvelle qui redonne confiance en l'avenir »

Donc, je laisse l'opposition à ses commentaires habituels et le peuple saura faire la différence en temps et lieu, M. le président.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me now turn to my Ministry responsible of the financial sector. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the financial services sector, which comprises the banking sector, the global business sector, the investment and asset management sector, the insurance sector as well as equity and securities markets, plays a prominent role in the Mauritian economy.

In spite of the lockdown last year and this year, our financial services sector has been very proactive and implement a work from home structure. My Ministry conducted several meetings with the operators of the private sector to understand their challenges and take necessary actions in a timely manner. One of the rare sectors, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that has worked in a quasi-normal situation in those trying times.

The result, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that, the financial services sector has remained resilient to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and also to the inclusion of Mauritius in the list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) since last year. In fact, if we look at the figures of recruitment made last year, it has increased by nearly 1000 new recruits in that sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the International Financial Centre (IFC) in Mauritius is a core part of the economy and Mauritius has the second most developed financial sector in Africa. In line with the recommendations of the Blueprint Report and Vision 2030 of the Government, to double the size of the financial sector, the IFC aspires to grow its contribution to GDP to USD1.9 billion, thereby increasing the employment to about 17,000 jobs and revenue to USD300 m. in real terms.

The Budget 2021/2022 proposed a twofold approach for the Financial Services Sector. Firstly, to enhance the status of our Financial Services Centre as a jurisdiction of highest global standards and secondly, to continue to improve and deepen the service offerings of our Financial Services Centre.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, whilst the Budget 2021-2022 is fully aligned with the Action Plan which was designed for the implementation of the Blueprint Report issued in 2018, the measures announced will provide necessary levers and enablers to enable our implementation of the Action Plan.

The Budget has clearly demonstrated the importance given to the financial services sector and the need to protect and promote our jurisdiction as a financial sector of excellence and repute.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, last year, I revamped the mandate of the Financial Services Consultative Council (FSCC) to strategise on the implementation of the Blueprint recommendations which were issued since 2018. The Financial Services Consultative Council is a public and private committee chaired by myself.

Accordingly, five expert groups were set up composed of a mix of representatives from the public and private sector to review the recommendations and devise the right approach to implement same.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Delivery Unit has been set up at the level of my Ministry composed of officers of my Ministry and also officers of the Project Office at the level of the Financial Services Commission. The objective of this Unit is to implement the recommendations of the Blueprint which have been duly endorsed by the FSCC and Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in May 2020, my Ministry has set up a Financial Services Law Advisory Committee in order to ensure the Mauritius IFC has an updated regulatory framework for the financial services sector and I am pleased to note that in line with the Blueprint recommendations and with a view to ensure a good regulatory practice for the jurisdiction, the Minister of Finance has announced the setting up of a Business Regulatory Reform Council (BBRC) under the aegis of his Ministry to address regulatory and administrative reform needs and advise Government on regulatory policy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one key example of matters addressed before the Financial Services Law Advisory Committee was to consider extending the purview of the partial exemption regime and I would like here to thank the Minister of Finance for having announced that the scope of the partial exemption tax regime will be broadened to cover investment dealers and other types of leasing activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to ensure that stakeholders and the public can have timely access to any change in the regulatory framework for the financial services sector, a repository for amendments brought to legislation has been set up in order to ensure that all members of the public can have central point of access to this information and this will be implemented by the end of this month.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in our quest to be more efficient, less costly and user friendly to service our financial institutions, corporates and High Net Worth Individuals, the FSC has been working on the Online Submission Platform to allow Management Companies and other

applicants to submit applications for licenses on an online platform. It also allows payment of fees online through Electronic Payment Instructions, and provides an interactive platform amongst Government agencies. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this platform will be launched in the weeks to come.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is ranked 13th on the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index and we cannot rest on our laurels. Key measures have been announced to ensure that we can maintain our attractiveness as a jurisdiction of choice but also ensure that we continue to improve our ease of doing business and cost of doing business in Mauritius. These measures include amongst others –

- the setting up of a common platform for fitness and propriety of investors and professionals operating in the sector by the Financial Services Commission, as well as
- the implementation of a digital centralised information exchange system by the Financial Services Commission to facilitate motor insurance claim recoveries.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Financial Services sector is about Trust and having adverse article against the jurisdiction can definitely jeopardise the trust of the investor community. Mauritius has often been in the Press for adverse reasons over the past years. There is, therefore, an urgent need to repair and protect our image as a jurisdiction and especially as a financial sector of excellence. To address these challenges, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Expert Group under the FSCC has set up a crisis protocol to address adverse publicity for our sector. The objective is to ensure that in case of any adverse article, one of the key stakeholders will be required to respond within the next 24 hours. This will contribute in preventing foreign Press or even local Press from making unnecessary assumptions or not providing accurate information to the public.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a website has also been created for the Mauritius IFC which will be a single website for all matters pertaining to the Financial Services Sector and can showcase the different services and products being offered by Mauritius. The launch was expected to be held last month, however due to the sanitary restrictions, this has been rescheduled for July 2021.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a new platform has been set up between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the EDB and my Ministry to

update the Economic Counsellors and Ambassadors on the developments in the Financial Services Sector and devise a clear scope of their duties. I heard earlier on, hon. Ameer Meea was talking about how we can also be in the forefront at the diplomatic level to promote our jurisdiction and again, this Toolkit for Ambassadors has been developed with a view to building and promoting the image of Mauritius' reputation as an IFC of excellence and sound repute.

The launching of the booklet will be held in the first week of July this year. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the FSCC has also highlighted the need to appoint a Public Relations (PR) Firm at the earliest to assist in repairing, protecting and building the image of our jurisdiction. We are currently working with the EDB to devise the requirements. Given that we have had two challenging years in 2020 and 2021, it is of utmost importance that we give adequate visibility to Mauritius as an International Financial Centre (IFC) both locally and abroad. This will also help in our intention to appoint a consultant at the earliest to help in repairing the image of our jurisdiction.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as announced in the Budget, the Ministry is looking forward to the setting up of a dedicated Commission for financial services to devise and monitor an effective and timely promotion and reputation management strategy for Mauritius as an IFC.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, skills are not build overnight. We need to train our people and at the same time ensure that those who have returned to their motherland have the right condition of work so that they do not leave again. Recognising that Financial Services is a talent-intensive industry, the Financial Services Institute (FSI) set up in 2018 as a body corporate under my Ministry to act as a Training Partner of choice for the sector by offering demand-driven specialist training programmes and conducting Employability Programmes to enhance job-readiness of our youth.

In support of Government's commitment with the Financial Action Task Force, since June last year, my Ministry has mandated the FSI to provide training to thousands of professionals from Boardroom to operational level on "Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism". These specialist programmes have been offered to the banking and non-banking sectors as well as Designated Non-Financial Business and Professions (DNFBPs).

In this respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the FSI is in ready state to support the implementation of the one-year training programme on AML and related matters to 100

graduates under a joint Bank of Mauritius and Financial Services Commission scheme. It may be worth mentioning, that the FSI adopts a ‘Putting Mauritius First’ motto and accordingly, promotes local training and education bodies. In this respect, a partnership agreement has already been entered into with the Open University of Mauritius and specialist programmes of the FSI are being duly certified by the Open University.

These high-quality award programmes will undoubtedly support budgetary proposals aimed at attracting international students to our shores and early on, the hon. Ramful was talking about how to address the problem of ageing population and we see it again in the Budget, the measures to allow students from overseas to come and study and work after that, is one of the measures put in place to address that challenge, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I want to say is that we have had to face a lot of challenges. We are at a point where to attract foreign banks to be set up in Mauritius, I am glad that the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has announced that the Bank of Mauritius guidelines will be reviewed and that the setting up of regional offices by international banks will be considered, that again goes in line with what the operators of the global business are waiting for. So, we are very much awaiting this review so that we can see the sector growing further.

The next thing that we have also to address, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to be more resilient, is for the sector to come up with new and innovative products. And to achieve these objectives, since last year, my Ministry and the FSC have launched a series of products, namely the –

- (a) Peer to Peer Lending;
- (b) the Security Token Offering;
- (c) Reviewed the Family Office rules, and
- (d) Revamp the Special Purpose Fund.

There are also a series of products that are currently in the pipeline, namely –

- Global Shared Services;
- Variable Capital Company, and
- Insurance Wrapper.

Alongside the products and licenses which are already in the pipeline, there will be new initiatives which we expect will be giving a new impetus to the financial services sector, namely –

- (a) a Securitisation Bill, and
- (b) a new Securities Bill will be introduced in this coming financial year.

The Stock Exchange of Mauritius will introduce rules for the setting up of a Special Purpose Acquisition Company.

The FSC will issue Regulatory Sandbox Licenses for activities falling under its purviews and will also revamp the existing framework for investment banking activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is coming up with a national strategy for Fintech. A number of initiatives have already been undertaken and I note with much pleasure that the series of measures were announced to strengthen the position of Mauritius as a Fintech Hub for the region. These measures include –

- A new legislation for virtual assets will be enacted;
- The Bank of Mauritius will issue a new guideline in respect of the usage of Application Programming Interface (API) to support open banking facilities;
- The Bank of Mauritius will roll-out a Central Bank Digital Currency, the Digital Rupee on a pilot basis;
- The Bank of Mauritius will introduce a dedicated QR Code at national level to facilitate digital payments;
- The Bank of Mauritius will set up respectively an Open-Lab for banking and payment Solutions and the FSC will set up a Fintech Innovation Lab to encourage an entrepreneurship culture.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I note also that a Digital Services Academy will also be set up. We believe that Fintech courses are now a priority. So, I look forward to those measures being implemented rapidly.

You will recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in March 2020 between the Standard Chartered Bank and Government of Mauritius through my Ministry for the development of a Sustainable Financing Framework for Mauritius which will cater for the issuance of new product offerings in terms of green, blue or sustainability bonds. I know that the Bank of Mauritius has come up with the guidelines and, at the level of my Ministry, we are working at the framework which is going to be made

public shortly in line with the measure announced to come up with a green economy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Before I conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me talk on the FATF. M. le président, l'année dernière, notre juridiction a été placée malheureusement sur la liste grise du GAFI et la liste noire de l'Union Européenne (EU).

Depuis l'année dernière, toutes les autorités concernées, avec l'appui de l'ensemble du gouvernement, et du Premier ministre lui-même personnellement, ont mis en œuvre tous les efforts pour répondre aux attentes du GAFI. Quatre rapports ont depuis été soumis aux assesseurs du GAFI pour démontrer le progrès accompli par Maurice.

Malheureusement, le premier rapport ne pouvait être analysé, Covid-19 oblige. Mais les trois autres rapports successifs ont été analysés par les assesseurs du GAFI et je suis satisfait qu'on ait démontré suffisamment de progrès pour satisfaire les attentes des assesseurs du GAFI.

La semaine prochaine une session plénière du GAFI est prévue et j'espère que l'effort de Maurice sera reconnu afin qu'on puisse sortir de la liste grise du GAFI le plus tôt possible et, comme convenu, une sortie tacite de la liste noire de l'Union Européenne. Hier, M. le président, lors de son intervention, l'honorable Dr. Aumeer, sans pudeur, vient dire que le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam est en train d'intervenir auprès du GAFI pour faire sortir Maurice de la liste grise. M. le président, le GAFI est une institution réputée, reconnue internationalement et qui se base sur les aspects techniques pour voir si un pays a des «déficiences» ou pas. Nous sommes en train de travailler (les techniciens) - et on met tout l'effort qu'il faut pour pouvoir adresser ces déficiences et on espère, justement comme je disais, faire ce qu'il faut pour satisfaire ces assesseurs. Je crois que le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam est la personne la moins qualifiée de pouvoir aller parler avec les gens du GAFI, lui qui a violé la loi contre le blanchiment d'argent, parce qu'on sait que des centaines de millions de roupies se trouvaient en sa possession.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a Court case and the case is being heard. I think this is unparliamentary. I expect the hon. Minister to withdraw.

(Interruptions)

Mr Seeruttun: Mais, je parle de ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hold on! Hold on!

The Deputy Speaker: Hold on! You mean there is a Court case with regard to *blanchiment d'argent* against Dr. Navin Ramgoolam?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, there is a case which is being heard before the Court in relation to the confiscation of what belongs to him.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I am not aware exactly...

Dr. Boolell: I am saying there is a Court case which is being heard and it is unfair on behalf of the hon. Minister to raise a matter which is being heard before the Court.

The Deputy Speaker: Court case with regard to money?

Dr. Boolell: With regard to anything that relates to Dr. Ramgoolam. The cases are being heard.

The Deputy Speaker: No! No!

(*Interruptions*)

No! No! Order! Let me take the point of order! Hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, I want to hear your point, but I have got to be able to understand and determinate it. I know Rs220 m...

Dr. Boolell: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it what we are talking about?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have made myself very clear. There is a Court case and the case is being heard in relation to accusation levelled against Dr. Ramgoolam. So, if there is a case being heard, it is unfair on behalf of the hon. Minister to raise a matter which is before the Court.

The Deputy Speaker: This is what I am saying. I agree with you. There is a case against Dr. Navin Ramgoolam. He is talking about money, it could be any case; it could be a case like...

Dr. Boolell: No! I think you have to be fair. The name of Dr. Ramgoolam has been mentioned. I call upon the hon. Minister, as a gentleman, to withdraw. He cannot level accusation, an unfair accusation against a person who is not a Member of this House.

The Deputy Speaker: I got your point. I got your point now!

(*Interruptions*)

Order, please! Hon. Minister, can you please enlighten me. Are you talking about a case which is presently before the Court concerning Dr. Navin Ramgoolam?

Mr Seeruttun: Non, je parle de ce que déjà les assesseurs de GAFI ont tous vu....

Dr. Boolell: Non! Non! Non!

The Deputy Speaker: Wait, I will listen to you! Let me listen!

Mr Seeruttun:...comment dans le coffre d'un ancien Premier ministre...

The Deputy Speaker: You have to speak up quite clearly so that I can get it!

Mr Seeruttun: Je dis que tout le monde a vu et aussi les experts de GAFI ont vu comment dans le coffre d'un ancien Premier ministre, il y avait des centaines de millions de l'argent liquide, ce qui violent, bien sûr, la loi contre le blanchiment d'argent. En tous les cas, ce que je veux dire, M. le président, c'est qu'une personne qui va à la Cour, il ne va pas être pris au sérieux par une agence comme le GAFI.

The Deputy Speaker: So...

(*Interruptions*)

Wait! Wait! Wait! I will listen to you.

Dr. Boolell: I listened to the reasoning...

The Deputy Speaker: Dr. the hon. Boolell, give me one second, I am listening to you. I will listen to everything that you have to say. I am listening.

So, I am clear about you are not referring to any Court cases. Thank you very much.

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: Not at all!

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Now, I would not listen. If you have any more points of order, I will listen.

Dr. Boolell: Am I to understand that the hon. Minister has withdrawn...

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no!

Dr. Boolell: ...what we consider to be unparliamentary?

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no! Dr. the hon. Boolell, the Minister has clearly stated that he is not talking about a Court case. So, I cannot rule on your point of order, giving you *gain de cause* when he is saying he is not talking about a Court case. Now, I am asking you, not a point of clarification or anything, do you have another point of order? If you do, I will listen to it. You do not have?

Dr. Boolell: No, but if he says...

The Deputy Speaker: No, no. do you have a point of order? Then we will go there.

Dr. Boolell: I have already made my point clear.

The Deputy Speaker: Right now...

Dr. Boolell: That you give a ruling in relation to what the hon. Minister has said.

The Deputy Speaker: My ruling is already clear.

Dr. Boolell: All right, if your ruling is clear, so let it be.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Thank you very much!

Mr Bérenger: On the same point of order, I heard the Minister say - and it can be checked - that Dr. Ramgoolam has been found guilty of money...

(*Interruptions*)

We can check. You said *mot à mot* that he has been found guilty of money laundering, and this is precisely the case that is before the Court.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: On that issue, ...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: ...he said that Dr. Ramgoolam has already been found guilty of money laundering when this is precisely the case that (...).

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! I know as well Dr. Navin Ramgoolam has not been found guilty of 220 m. cash.

(*Interruptions*)

If you said so, withdraw it!

Mr Seeruttun: Je n'ai jamais dit ça, M. le président, et je dis encore que...

(*Interruptions*)

Il y a des allégations, c'est sûr. Mais, je n'ai jamais dit qu'il a été condamné pour ça. J'ai dit que voilà - parce que j'ai fait référence à ce qu'a dit le Dr. Aumeer hier en parlant que le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, en vrai chef d'Etat, intervient auprès du GAFI pour nous faire sortir de la liste du GAFI.

The Deputy Speaker: So, what is clear in my head is you, at no point, said that...

(Interruptions)

Let me continue! You, at no point, said that Dr. Navin Ramgoolam has been convicted of any cases and the point made by hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger is that he said he was convicted.

Mr Bérenger: He said Dr. Ramgoolam has been found guilty of money laundering.

(Interruptions)

We can check. If there is need to check, let's check.

Mr Seeruttun: Okay. Okay. Check!

Mr Bérenger: Sure!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I feel hon. Members are not happy that I am listening to the point of order. I am trying to do the best that I can to get matters out of the way. I hope hon. Members do appreciate what I'm doing. So, please, at this stage, my ruling is, from what I hear from the hon. Minister and from what I hear from hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger, there is apparent difference in what was allegedly said and what was allegedly heard. I will have to listen to the video.

Thank you very much for listening to me without interrupting, but now we can continue with your speech.

Mr Seeruttun: Merci, M. le président. Donc, je disais que voilà un travail qui a été fait par les techniciens, ils ont travaillé nuit et jour depuis l'année dernière pour faire ce qu'il faut faire, pour aider à ce que Maurice sorte de la liste le plus tôt possible. C'est un peu indécent de voir quelqu'un vouloir prendre la paternité de cet effort. En tout le cas, on verra bientôt l'issu de ce problème, M. le président.

Je voudrais, avant de terminer, parce que le temps fait défaut et que je dois conclure dans quelques minutes. Je voudrais profiter de l'occasion pour remercier encore une fois le ministre des Finances pour la somme allouée à ma circonscription, Vieux Grand Port/Rose Belle. R 1.2 milliards pour adresser les problèmes d'inondations dans ma circonscription. Mes deux colistières ont parlé en long et en large les différents projets. Donc, pour moi, je voulais juste dire que lors de ces récents problèmes qu'on a eus par rapport à des grosses pluies et à l'inondation, le Premier ministre, lui-même, s'est fait un devoir de descendre dans la circonscription pour voir l'état des dégâts causés et avait pris l'engagement de prendre des

actions nécessaires afin de régler ces problèmes. Encore ça démontre parole donnée c'est parole sacrée.

Donc, merci au ministre de Finances d'avoir alloué une somme aussi conséquente pour pouvoir régler le problème de ma circonscription. J'avais aussi promis les habitants de la région côtière de ma circonscription qu'on allait transformer cette région et je vois déjà que le travail a commencé par rapport au *coastal protection* et je peux dire, et je peux confirmer que d'ici 2024 toute cette région va être transformée et devenir vraiment un lieu agréable à aller visiter.

Donc, M. le président, le budget sera voté bientôt et le défi reste dans l'exécution. Je pense que nous avons la capacité, des compétences, la volonté, et surtout avec le leadership incarné par le Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, nous serons à la hauteur de l'attente de notre population et démontrer qu'on est une nation résiliente, qui sait comment faire face à l'adversité malgré quelques, ce qu'on appelle, les *James Meade* locaux qui ne voient que de problèmes dans ce pays.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Armance, would you mind telling me how long you would be?

Mr Armance: 25 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: 25 minutes. All right! You may start.

(5.37 p.m.)

Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Indeed, it is a pleasure to be back in the House after 21 days.

The Deputy Speaker: You are welcome back as well!

Mr Armance: Thank you. So, I was saying it is a pleasure to be back after 21 days of quarantine and self-isolation. I would like to thank the Whip of the Labour Party, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, the Whip of the MMM party, hon. Ameer Meea and also the Government Whip for all the support they gave to me during my absences for the last 21 days. Being in quarantine, Mr Deputy Speaker is not easy. I would like to convey my support through you to all those who are in quarantine, all those who are under treatment for COVID-19 and I wish them prompt recovery.

On a separate note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have taken note that today we have 14 orators on the list and I made a request to the Government Whip that if ever, the debate is going to be adjourned today, to give the opportunity for a Member of the Opposition to do a speech on Monday. So, I hope that my request will be taken into consideration and through you, I am going to reiterate this request, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I will come back to the quarantine a bit later in my speech.

I had the opportunity to watch the Budget Speech on the TV like most of the Mauritians did on the budget day and my first impression, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that I was listening to the budget of the National Development Unit, mainly announcing construction projects.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, each and every Mauritian was expecting that the Minister of Finance will announce measures to relieve the population, especially when we are facing the pandemic and many sectors are on the knees. I have come across a letter, an open letter that was published. I would not read it completely; I am going to quote a few lines. This letter was addressed - it is an open letter - from a mother to the Minister of Finance.

It is in French. It is about a mother who takes care of the house. *Je cite, M. le président –*

« Une maman qui panique en faisant ses achats au supermarché. Une maman qui réduit ses ingrédients pour le repas. Une maman qui a souvent envie de pleurer, souvent envie de hurler, de fuir. »

Et elle continue pour dire -

« Et votre budget, M. le ministre, ce n'est pas pour la maman que je suis, ni pour plein d'autres mamans comme moi. Qu'est-ce qui s'améliore dans ma vie pour le moment? Uniquement ma capacité à m'émerveiller quand même devant les jolies choses. »

Et je ne vais pas terminer. On parle des vêtements de la femme du ministre que je ne veux pas citer. Ceci dit, M. le président, cette lettre ouverte, ces cris du cœur d'une mère de famille qui doit subvenir aux besoins de sa famille. C'est clair et net qu'on ne se retrouve pas dans ce Budget. Des familles mauriciennes ne se retrouvent plus dans ce genre de budget qui a été présenté par l'honorable Dr. Padayachy quelques semaines de cela.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our purchasing power has gone so low that all Mauritians, we are suffering now. I am going to ask myself since there have been so many rises in the price,

abusive rises in prices of commodities in the island, where is the National Price Consultative Council?

I came across another article from Jayen Chellum because I wanted to find out whether Government is taking actions regarding the cost of living in Mauritius. I wanted to find out whether someone is going to do something to relieve these types of ladies, who are suffering, who are not able to gather for the family. And, it comes to my attention what Mr Jayen Chellum said -

« Le comité n'a pas siégé depuis des mois. »

This was a Press article. I can table it if you want. And, I went deeper to find out, since the pandemic started, since all the prices started rising in Mauritius, what was the action of the Government? What was the action of responsible NGOs? What was the action of people responsible to moderate the prices? Has there been any action? And, I again found out that only three meetings were held from last June to this June. In one year, only three meetings were held by the National Price Consultative Council to remediate the situation where this lady is suffering because of price increase.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not protecting our Mauritian people. It has been announced for so many years now that there will be a Consumer Protection Bill. If I am not wrong, there was already a draft in 2014, before the elections and so far, nothing has been done. The Bill has not been implemented *et ça, c'est au détriment des consommateurs*. I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Government has failed in addressing the issues of consumer protection as well as relieving the population from price increases in many sectors, especially in the Food and Nutrition Sector.

Let us take a look at how effective the Government has been for the last year. There were three main points opposed to reflect the New Normal. That was last year's Budget about rolling out. *L'élan de relance de l'investissement*, engaging major reforms, securing sustainable and inclusive development. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been no rolling plan, no major reforms, no sustainable and inclusive development for one whole year.

Le bouc émissaire parfait, c'était la pandémie, c'était COVID-19. Voilà comment le gouvernement a été efficient pendant 12 mois, après le *New Normal Budget* de l'année dernière.

They talk about protection of jobs of thousands of men and women. It was in the Budget of last year, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I took some minutes to go through the report of

Statistics Mauritius regarding Labour Force in Mauritius. I also share the views of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Shakeel Mohamed, who spoke before me, who mentioned the real figure of unemployment in Mauritius. How can they protect employment for the 12 months and yet, unemployment has increased drastically in Mauritius? Drastically! Yes, they have been saying it is about COVID-19. Everything for this Government is related to COVID-19. Everything! Wherever they failed, it is because of COVID-19. Wherever they are not performing well, it is because of COVID-19.

Mr Deputy, Speaker, Sir, on this report that I have in my hand, labour force that is economically active, 52,000 something, but we have also labour force that is economically inactive and they are potential labour force. It is written in the report of Statistics Mauritius and it is about 42,000 unemployed. This makes a total of nearly 100,000 unemployed in Mauritius. This is exactly what the Minister of Finance was predicting. He is going to save employment and that is what will happen now. We have nearly 100,000 unemployed in Mauritius. And, he was wise enough.

In the Budget, why did he come with the figures of what Statistics Mauritius published? You know what he did? He used a percentage of 9.2% to the labour force and if you apply this 9.2% to the labour force, it makes you something about 40,000 to 50,000 unemployed. So, his figures are completely wrong. This was pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition, by hon. Shakeel Mohamed and I also maintain that we do not have the real figures for unemployment in Mauritius. This Government that promised us that they are going to save jobs, a 100, 000 have been lost up to now. The real figure, the real percentage of unemployment to-date, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is 16.5%. I went and checked it. I did that calculation. We are completely right and they are completely wrong. Why is it that now the Minister of Finance is hiding the figures? Why is it that in his Budget Speech, he uses a percentage ratio compared to figures that are clearly listed out, published in Statistics Mauritius? I think, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is high time that the Government gives us real values and stops hiding, tampering with figures.

I also want to address the issue of promises. Many more projects have not been realised. Many projects that were promised to the population last year have not even started. Que des effets d'annonces vont plaire aux oreilles de la population, pour berner les gens. Pour être gentil, je ne vais pas essayer d'être plus - J'ai dans ma main le Budget 2020-2021 et comme vous voyez, il y a pas mal de *tags*. A n'importe quelle page du Budget, M. le président, vous allez retrouver un projet qui n'a pas été réalisé. Je vous donne le document,

tournez et choisissez la page que vous voulez. A chaque page, il y a un projet, il y a une promesse qui a été faite à la population qui n'a pas été respectée.

Comment maintenant, allons nous croire ce gouvernement qui vient avec un nouveau budget pour venir berner encore une fois la population?

M. le président, je peux prendre n'importe quel exemple, paragraphe 32 - Bus Terminal Modernisation Programme où c'est? Je tourne une autre page, juste pour vous donner quelques exemples. *Central Bank Digital Currency*, pas fait! Il y en a pleins, je ne vais pas m'attarder à citer des exemples, c'était pour vous dire que le gouvernement d'alors, le budget 2020, le budget de promesses est resté au stade de promesses, M. le président. On ne peut plus, nous mauriciens, accepter qu'un gouvernement vienne nous berner, vienne faire des promesses et puis que rien ne se passe dans ce pays-là.

Et comme par hasard, cette année ci, l'honorable ministre des Finances vient annoncer au paragraphe 441 je pense, qu'il va faire un Project Implementation and Monitoring Agency. Tout d'un coup, comme si maintenant son sommeil s'est cassé, il sort de son rêve, il va faire quelque chose pour venir implémenter les projets et là, tout le monde va croire que maintenant les projets vont être implémentés. Mais c'est quelque chose qui existe depuis longtemps, M. le président, j'ai été au gouvernement aussi en 2014, je me rappelle...

Mr Nuckcheddy: Grace au MSM!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Armance: Pas pressé!

Je me rappelle de Sir Anerood Jugnauth, qui demandait aux ministres de s'assurer que le projet soit implémenté. Mais qu'en est-il du gouvernement actuel? Qu'en est-il de ce gouvernement ? Tous ces projets n'ont pas été implémentés.

M. le président, moi je pense *it is a real joke!* C'est juste un cauchemar et on espère juste qu'un jour ça va finir. Par exemple, j'ai un autre document entre mes mains, je vous parle du *New Cancer Centre*.

En 2015, M. le président, ça a été annoncé –

“A number of new projects will be implemented ranging from the setting up of a New Cancer Centre.”

Ça c'était en 2015. En 2016, on retire ça du tiroir encore *ène fois* –

“Government is also investing to expand hospital infrastructure, this includes the New Cancer Centre.”

En 2018, on nous refait le coup –

“Third, a New Cancer Centre will be set up.”

En 2019, on nous ramène le même truc encore –

“Our plan is to complete the New Cancer Hospital.”

En 2020 –

“A New Cancer Hospital using state-of-the-art technology.”

Je crois qu'ils ont rajouté le *state-of-the-art* en 2020.

En 2021, M. le président, -

“This includes an amount of Rs2.3 billion for the construction of a New Cancer Centre.”

Je vais devoir voir l'honorable Seeruttun, qui a une boule de cristal, qui plus tôt avait deviné comment les députés aller traiter le budget, c'est lui qui a la boule de cristal pour deviner qu'est-ce qui va arriver en 2021. Moi, je ne peux pas deviner, excusez-moi.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just can conclude that this Government has limited vision. There is no accountability. There is a poor management and a serious lack of leadership. Talking about accountability, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am the Whip of the Opposition, it is my duty as well to go through PQ's and I will show you how these people are accountable. I have got in my hand a list of unanswered PQ's. Guess who is the champion? Guess who is on the top of the list of not answering PQ's? Hon. frontliner of frontliners! You know who is the guy, *the taper*, hon. Dr. Jagutpal! Second best, hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth! Third, hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, hon. Dr. Padayachy!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to lead by example. Three senior Ministers in the Government, they are the champions of not being accountable to us, MPs, who put questions to the House. I will say it again; we have to lead by example. These three persons I have just mentioned are three senior Ministers! I mean, *on ne peut pas réinventer la roue, il y a des gens qui sont comme ça.*

Let me give my views on what I call operation *menteur menteur*. You know for a country to be healthy, we have to be stable, we have to derive proper revenues, control our

expenses and of course have proper reserves. What did the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development do with the reserves? What did he do with the special reserve from the Bank of Mauritius? I am not going to go in detail but there is one point that I want the whole population to understand and it was subject to a PNQ. I am going to say it again, I will say it 2-3 times if necessary because I think each and every Mauritian should understand what this Government did with the special reserve fund that it took from the Bank of Mauritius. It is known by everyone that the Government benefited from Rs60 billion from the Bank of Mauritius. Out of the Rs60 billion, Rs32 billion has been granted free of charge to the Government.

But where the devil lies, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is about the Rs28 billion that has been given to the Government by the Bank of Mauritius and it has been treated like a revenue not a loan! It is not a grant, it is not a gift, it is money that the Government needs to refund to the Bank of Mauritius. So we like it or not, it is a fact! We are going to cry, we are going to shout, we are going to do all sort of Press Communiqué about the treatment of this money, it is a fact! This money was given to Government and this money needs to return to the *Bank of Mauritius*.

We do not know for how long, there is not terms and conditions, there is no terms of contract, there is no contract at all, but one day or another, this money needs to be returned to the Bank of Mauritius and the Bank of Mauritius issued a Communiqué and they said that they are not going to pay the dividend to the Government for the coming years until they recover the full amount that has been given to the Government. In fact, this Rs28 billion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has not been treated properly in the account. We all know what is going to happen if they add the Rs28 billion as a loan, instead of putting it as a revenue. *Ça veut dire. M. le président, en langage simple, que la Banque de Maurice a prêté de l'argent au gouvernement. Je le redis, cet argent sera remboursé sur le profit futur de la Banque et que le gouvernement lui a dit que ce n'est pas un emprunt, c'est une avance et je ne sais pas pourquoi une avance est traitée comme un revenu alors que c'est une dette!*

M. le président, the real public debt figure is absolutely wrong. Encore une fois, on essaie de nous cacher la vérité, on essaie de présenter à la population *something that is very healthy*.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mohamed! Thank you very much.

Sorry.

Mr Armance: No is it okay, it is fine.

On essaie de présenter à la population des chiffres qui sont healthy, alors que nous réalisons, M. le président, *that they are tampering, manipulating all the figures to hide the truth from the population. Moody's has downgraded us, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IMF report is damning.* Ici, on a un budget qui parle de drains, d'autoroutes, de projets de construction. M. le ministre qui a intervenu avant moi est le ministre des Services Financiers, il s'est attardé pendant des heures à faire de la politique et n'a pris que 10 minutes pour nous expliquer le secteur du service financier et, ce n'est qu'à la dernière minute, qu'il vient nous raconter GAFI, malheureusement, ça a été interrompu par des *point of orders*. Quelle est la considération que ce gouvernement donne aujourd'hui à notre *offshore*, à notre secteur financier pour réellement avoir ce vouloir de retirer Maurice sur la liste noire de la GAFI ? Que cinq minutes de son temps, M. le président, c'est tout ce qu'il a à dire comme réforme, comme mesures qu'ils sont en train de prendre pour venir vraiment avec des solutions concrets pour retirer Maurice sur la liste noire. Pour moi, M. le président, c'est une honte. Je l'ai écouté et ça donne envie de vomir qu'un ministre responsable du service financier ne prenne que cinq minutes de son temps pour expliquer, mais il a passé largement son temps à commenter de A à Z sur tous les membres de l'opposition qui ont intervenu avant lui.

M. le président, on va se retrouver avec des drains 5 étoiles, des autoroutes 5 étoiles mais quel est l'avenir de notre service financier, ce secteur qui pendant longtemps a été le fleuron de notre économie. J'ai parlé des mesures qui n'ont pas été cités dans cette Chambre ; là, il vient de me dire '*semaine prochaine to pou koner.*' On aurait bien aimé qu'il nous dise aujourd'hui ce qu'il est en train de faire. Pourquoi attendre la semaine prochaine ? Certes, de la façon que nos institutions fonctionnent, M. le président, je me pose encore la question : cette '*semaine prochaine mo pou koner la*', est-ce qu'un jour on arrivera à sortir de cette fameuse liste noire, grise ou toutes sortes de couleurs qu'on est en train d'entacher la réputation de l'île Maurice ? Je redis, on est en train d'entacher la réputation du service financier de l'île Maurice. Les gens vont commencer à perdre confiance ; les investisseurs ont déjà perdu confiance dans nos institutions, M. le président. À trop vouloir bien faire, *ena p mal fer, p defer* et c'est nous qui allons payer les pots cassés, M. le président.

In this year's Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is mention about the Flood Management Programme. Yes, I fully agree that we need to build drains. I fully agree that many projects are late; I am 100% agreeable to that. Last year, Rs1.2 billion was announced for drainage project, and this year, Rs11.7 billion is announced in the Budget under the Flood

Management Programme. I again say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is very important that we have drains, we fully agree but, what about the maintenance of the said drains? The major issues with the maintenance of drains should have been addressed first before investing massively in construction projects. The quality of work of the contractor, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is terrible. In my Constituency, No. 1, that of GRNW and Port Louis West, one project started more than two years but not completed. It is very close to my house, I can see it every day. The project has not even been completed. I invite the PPS, please go and check the level, the quality of work that they are doing there. This is causing much inconvenience to the inhabitants there, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I hope the PPS can go there, have a look at what type of work these people are doing in the constituency, then you will understand.

Yes, flash flood is now a reality. Many regions require serious and urgent attention, but the Land Drainage Authority should be more active. *C'est toujours après la mort, la tisane avec ce gouvernement, M. le président.*

M. le president, from what we have discovered regarding the Kistnen case, after all the suspicions of corruption on the award of contracts, I will appeal to the hon. Minister to ensure that the Rs11.7 billion is spent effectively and that there is more transparency on the projects, the tender procedures and the execution of the projects. Let me remind you that Rs8.5 billion is being contributed by parastatal bodies as well.

I will address now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the social housing units.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not minded to stop you, but you said about 25 minutes. Are you going to be 25 minutes? 15 minutes?

Mr Armance: 10 more minutes, if you don't mind.

The Deputy Speaker: No, I don't mind, but we probably have to break as well. I don't want to break in the middle of your speech.

Mr Armance: Okay, so let me continue. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, almost all Ministries have received enormous allocation for the budget exercise. One thing I have to voice out is the construction of social housing. Last year, it was announced that Government will construct 12,000 social housing units over three years. One year is gone. God knows where are the housing units that were supposed to be constructed for Year 1. *M. le président, c'est l'enfant pauvre du budget de ministre des Finances, l'honorable Dr. Padayachy.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the priority of families considered as poor is to, at least, have something to eat before going to bed. We agree about that. How many of them are still considered as squatters? In my constituency, at Pointe aux Sables, people are still sleeping under '*la tente camper*', *à braver le froid, la chaleur, la pluie*. They do not drink Black Label whiskey; they drink 'black label tea', without milk and sugar. I am so thankful to all the *ONG, les bénévoles* who help to feed the people, who try to educate the children, provide support to the children. If they were really a caring Government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they would have already tackled the problem of poverty and squatters in Mauritius. This was promised by the hon. Prime Minister at the time he was the Minister of Finance as well. But what did this Government do, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? They created another SPV, the New Social Living Development Ltd and this is not going to be subject to PPA... That's all we have been doing out of the Rs12 m. voted last year, at paragraph 27 of the Budget 2020-2021, and this year the microwave repeated itself in paragraph 50 of the Budget in that they are going to construct 12,000 social housing units.

Let me clarify it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. First, it was announced that 1,285 housing units will be constructed, paragraph 52, when we refer to the Estimate and the KPI. We simply find out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the 1,285 housing units will be delivered by the National Housing Development Corporation, not by the NSLD, as they want us to believe. It is in the book; I have picked it up in the KPI, the document that was annexed to the Budget. In fact, the NHDC is only launching an expression of interest. Last year, we have seen them; we have seen them again today, this one is for the NEF, that they are only looking for plot of land after a year.

After a year, the project was announced. We are still looking for a plot of land to build social housing units. This morning it was in the newspaper. I cannot understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what has the Government been doing with Rs10 billion of budget voted last year and still nothing has been done this year?

I am very upset with the lack of measures concerning social housing units. I am really very upset, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. There is no indication; I have gone through the budget. There is no indication of what type of construction of social housing units the Government is going to do. Are we going to build high-rise buildings that was announced somewhere sometime last year or are they going to build small houses, how many square meters, are they going to create another ghetto? What are they going to do? I am very upset by the measures that have not been announced? This is a major project which required a major part of the

budget. I believe that it is the responsibility of the Minister who is going to speak after me, if he can come and clarify and give us some more details on the social housing units.

Having said so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to comment on measures that have been presented by the hon. Minister of Finance in regard to ICT and BPO sector. This regards the measure announced in the field. Here only, we can clearly see how the Government lacks vision and cannot think out of the box to create employment and perspective economic growth.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what was announced for this sector, a new cable connectivity by a fully private owned company and what more? Cashless payment?

Maybe out of the list, I can consider the opening of the Judicial Academy as a good project. The others are jokes, an insult to the professionals of the sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We all agree that the ICT/BPO sector alone stood at 5.9% growth to GDP. A good performance, we must agree in a world of uncertainties and economic difficulties, but what was announced to capitalise on such a positive result.

I come on my first point, internet broadband rate in Mauritius are among the highest worldwide. We are going towards a digital country while internet is still considered as a *luxe*. *Le gouvernement peut taper tambours et trompettes annonçant Maurice comme* the world top fibre country. But what about computer literacy? What about accessibility? And yet, *il n'y a rien, M. le président!*

The ICT/BPO sector needs strengthening or else one day soon it will collapse. This goes by good and proper education on the manner things are being done. I am going to move a bit forward because of time.

Last but not least, Work from Home was announced by the Government as being the best alternative to continue working away from offices even after the COVID-19 pandemic. Can the Minister of Finance enlighten us where the Work from Home initiative went? This is shameful, there is no initiative, even it was announced by the Government, there is nothing to do to encourage the Work from Home. Again, if there is a drop in the rate of the internet and we apply the Work from Home, it could have been a *rayon de soleil* in this sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

It is known as well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the country requires cleaning at all levels. Even at Government level, I think they require a good cleaning. But creating another Authority, which is a National Environment Cleaning Authority, with a seed funding of a 100

m. is only a duplication of duty, creation of job for *petits copains and petites copines* and a waste of resources at all levels. Worse! It shows that this new Authority is going to be under the Prime Minister's Office. It is a lack of confidence of the PMO to all the Ministers who are involved in the cleaning activity in Mauritius, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Why does the PMO now have to control the cleaning activity when you have the local authorities, the Ministry of Environment, the Beach Authority, the Road Development Authority, Mauri Facilities and Tourism Authority. All of them are engaged in the cleaning process and yet we still have a new Authority that is going to be – I am nearly done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the next 5 minutes, I have two points only.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Armance, you took 38 minutes. I am well minded to let you complete it.

Mr Armance: Yes, I have got only 2 points.

The Deputy Speaker: 2 minutes and I will break up, whether you complete or not.

Mr Armance: Okay.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Armance: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I started my speech today, I was mentioning about quarantine and self-isolation that I had to undergo for the last 21 days. I have disclosed my name, the name of my son of 13 years old and my friend who I was in contact and I voluntarily called the authority to be placed in quarantine. I will come back to where I want to go.

I can say that it was an excellent service from the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Bureau Sanitaire de Bamboo. I have nothing to complain about that. But I have one point about the contact-tracing procedures that I want to raise.

Unfortunately, the team rely only on information received from potential *patients*. It can only be concluded that some information can be false. I will give you one example, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

One hon. Member, sitting in this House today, his driver or bodyguard has been in quarantine for the last 14 days. Has the hon. Member been placed in isolation? Has he disclosed that his driver has been in quarantine for the last 14 days? I was forced yesterday, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to sit in the Office of the Clerk for 30 minutes. You know why? I

had to prove that my certificate was true. I had to prove that this document given to me by Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital was true. I even called the SCE to validate it. Has our Deputy Chairman of Committees, hon. Nuckcheddy, disclosed that his bodyguard/driver was in quarantine and that he should have been placed in isolation?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No, no! Wait, wait!

(Interruptions)

Mr Armance: This is where ...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Armance: ... the system fails, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

The Deputy Speaker: Wait! Wait, wait!

Mr Armance: No! I am going to ...

Listen to me. I have not finished!

The Deputy Speaker: No, I rule the Chamber! You listen to me then we will listen to you!

I understand under the Quarantine Act, that would require another duty of care that would be incumbent upon the Member.

(Interruptions)

Mr Armance: I am going to take responsibility of what I am saying. My point, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,...

The Deputy Speaker: No! No! No!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: This is where the system fails!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No! Order! Whether you take responsibility...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Nuckcheddy!

Mr Nuckcheddy: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: I require you to listen when I am talking!

Mr Nuckcheddy: I was just replying to the ...

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no! I am not asking you for a reply! I'll just require you to listen when I am talking! Hon. Armance....

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Armance: ...to test PCR!

An hon. Member: *Mets ton masque quand tu parles!*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Armance!

An hon. Member: *To pa kone ki to koze ta!*

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: Wear your mask!

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: I will ask you to take up the matter administratively, not here right now.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Exactly, I have done my...

The Deputy Speaker: Order, hon. Nuckcheddy!

I will, in fact, ask you to break for the time being. Come back after the break! Come back after the break!

An hon. Member: *Ale, ale al bwar dite!*

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: *Pou al re ekout ankor la!*

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Order! Hon. Armance! Hon. Nuckcheddy! You do not want to come back after the break? Please!

Please continue!

Mr Armance: Let me conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Les membres de l'opposition ont si bien dit avec une présentation budgétaire sans mesures phares pour relancer notre économie et pour améliorer le quotidien des citoyens mauriciens. On fait face aujourd'hui à une flambée de prix de denrées de base; un environnement social au bord de l'explosion; un gouvernement sans cœur qui ne pense qu'à protéger ses petits amis, copains et copines. Les jours de cette équipe, M. le président, sont comptés. The hon. Minister of Finance will be remembered as being le père du désastre économique.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Let me take this opportunity to welcome you back anew in the Chambers.

(Interruptions)

Do you have a point of order?

Mrs Mayotte: Oui M. le président, je voudrai juste réagir par rapport à ce que l'honorable Armance vient tout juste de partager avec nous comme information...

The Deputy Speaker: *Non ! non !*

Mrs Mayotte: Non, je trouve que ce n'est pas bien de venir le faire maintenant...

The Deputy Speaker: Wait! *Non, non !* Wait!

(Interruptions)

Order, hon. Sandra Mayotte !

(Interruptions)

Mrs Mayotte: I want your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: *Non, non!* Hon. Sandra Mayotte, you have only one possibility of intervening right now, if you have a point of order. Is it a point of order?

Mrs Mayotte: I would prefer to say on a point of explanation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: No, you do not have it right now. Thank you very much. We will break for half an hour.

At 6.21 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.56 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Minister Lesjongard!

Mr Assirvaden: *Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, please.* Juste avant le break, M. le président, l'honorable Armance a fait une déclaration concernant le chauffeur de l'honorable membre Nuckcheddy qui est en quarantaine. Je voudrai savoir de la présidence si l'honorable Nuckcheddy a déclaré que son chauffeur personnel était en quarantaine, question de Covid et si l'honorable Nuckcheddy...

Mr Speaker: *J'ai bien compris.*

Mr Assirvaden: ... a fait un test...

Mr Speaker: I already understood your point!

Mr Assirvaden: Alors je voudrais, pour la sécurité sanitaire de l'Assemblée Nationale...

Mr Speaker: This is not a point of order. However, you can meet me in my office, make representation and I will look into the matter.

(6.56 p.m.)

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): *Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.* M. le président, permettez-moi de faire quelques commentaires brièvement sur le sujet qui a été évoqué à la Chambre. J'étais présent tout à l'heure là quand l'honorable Armance a fait mention de ce cas. Je peux, M. le président, personnellement rassurer la Chambre au nom du ministre de la Santé qu'en ce qui concerne la personne mentionnée dans le discours de l'honorable Armance, tout le protocole a été suivi à la règle.

M. le président, je suis depuis quelques années membre de ce Parlement et je suis assez choqué et étonné de voir qu'on balance une information d'importance capitale pendant une intervention sur le discours du budget et information qui concerne la santé premièrement de tous les honorables membres du Parlement, mais aussi d'une population. Le membre qui a partagé cette information à la Chambre, est quelqu'un qui est appelé demain à être peut-être de ce côté de la Chambre en tant que ministre, mais le comportement rabaisse le décorum de cette Chambre, M. le Président.

Il a une information d'importance capitale qui concerne la santé de toute une population et la loi régissant la quarantaine est claire. Il aurait dû, en tant que honorable

membre, assumer ses responsabilités et aller tout de suite aux autorités concernées et faire la plainte et non attendre le discours du budget pour venir faire cette plainte. Ça c'est une première chose.

(*Interruptions*)

I am not giving way, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am not giving way.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: There is no point of order.

An hon. Member: I have a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Do not insist.

Mr Lesjongard: I am not giving way.

Mr Speaker: That would be clarification, explanation but the Minister has to give way. He is not giving way. You are a seasoned parliamentarian; you know better than me what I am telling you.

Please, stop there! Minister, continue!

Mr Lesjongard: Merci, M. le président.

(*Interruptions*)

J'ai fait bien comprendre que je voulais intervenir pour rassurer la Chambre. Pourquoi ? Parce que pendant le *break*, je pense que tout un chacun, on s'est posé la question: est-ce qu'effectivement il y a eu violation du protocole ?

J'ai répondu non. Maintenant, posez-vous la question qu'en pense la population en écoutant ce que l'honorable Armance a dit à cette Chambre ? Si nous les responsables de ce pays...

Mr Armance: I have a point of order!

Mr Speaker: There is no point of order. This is debate!

Mr Lesjongard : ... nous ne pouvons assumer notre responsabilité...

(*Interruptions*)

... alors nous n'avons pas de place à l'intérieur de ce Parlement. Merci M. le président. M. le président, tout d'abord permettez-moi ...

Mr Armance: I have a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Yes?

Mr Armance: Yes, I have a point of order.

Mr Speaker: I will not listen to any point...

Mr Armance: Why? I have a point of order, section 43, he is imputing motives. He is imputing improper motives. My point raise...

Mr Lesjongard: *Where did I impute the motives?*

Mr Armance: The point I raise, Mr Speaker, Sir during my speech, I was...

(Interruptions)

I was asking whether, hon. Nuckcheddy did perform the PCR test. This is the point that I raised in the House.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members! Hon. Members! There is no debate about PCR. The debate is about Budget! If you think that there have been some violations or whatever, come and make representations to my Office and we stop with this cheap politics! Please!

Mr Lesjongard : M. le président, permettez-moi de...

Mr Assirvaden: *M. le président*, on a point of order!

Mr Speaker: Listen!

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, on peut vous voir dans votre bureau avant de continuer ?

Mr Speaker: Listen!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members, listen to me! No Member can come with a fraudulent point of order! There is no point of order about this. I have already ruled!

Mr Assirvaden : Mais rassurez-nous dans votre bureau d'abord.

Mr Lesjongard : M. le président, tout d'abord permettez-moi de féliciter mon collègue, l'honorable ministre des Finances et du développement économique pour la présentation du Budget 2021-2022. Je tiens aussi à remercier le Premier ministre, l'honorable

Pravind Kumar Jugnauth d'être notre guide, notre boussole en ces moments troubles et difficiles que nous vivons.

M. le président, c'est un budget présenté dans un contexte économique des plus compliqués surtout avec la Covid-19 et ce budget est présenté à un moment où le monde a un peu plus d'espérance d'une reprise économique et d'une sortie de crise avec la vaccination. M. le président, depuis la fin février de l'année dernière, Maurice comme tous les autres pays, nous faisons face au dilemme du Covid-19. Les décisions pour protéger la population ont eu des effets sur l'économie mondiale et locale. Le monde était à genoux mais nous nous relevons tout doucement avec la vaccination et le budget 2020-2021 et celui de 2021-2022 sont été présentés dans de telles conditions.

M. le président, ce contexte économique et social, me fait penser aux années de braise, aux années difficiles, c'est-à-dire les années 70, 80 et débuts 90 et certains de nos honorables membres étaient déjà sur la scène politique. Notre pays à cette époque a eu la bénédiction d'avoir un leader, un Premier ministre qui avait une vision et qui a construit avec conviction l'île Maurice que nous connaissons aujourd'hui. Il a laissé ses empreintes dans tous nos secteurs de développement. Le père de notre développement économique, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, SAJ, ou *bolom*, c'est lui qui a guidé mes premiers pas en politique et c'était mon mentor. Il a consacré toute une vie au service de son pays, il a façonné une île Maurice qui est reconnue mondialement pour son succès économique, sa stabilité politique et sociale. Il laisse derrière lui un solide héritage politique avec une culture de travail et de discipline.

M. le président, j'ai eu le privilège de servir mon pays sous Sir Anerood Jugnauth et l'exemple que je retiens, en tant qu'ancien ministre des Collectivités locales et de Rodrigues, c'est l'autonomie de l'île Rodrigues et aujourd'hui, en tant que ministre des Utilités publiques et de l'énergie, je retiens entre autres la construction du barrage de Midlands. Un projet qui a apporté ses résultats pour le bien-être des habitants du nord, de Port-Louis et aussi les planteurs de la région nord. Sous le règne de Sir Anerood Jugnauth, M. le président, nous avons connu des investissements massifs dans les infrastructures telles que l'eau et l'électricité afin de développer le secteur manufacturier et le tourisme. Aujourd'hui, nous devons tous aussi reconnaître que nous avons un des meilleurs réseaux de fourniture d'électricité en Afrique. L'actuel Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, a adopté le même style de travail, de discipline et une vision pour une île Maurice prospère.

Malheureusement, M. le président, la Covid-19 est apparue au début de l'année dernière, et a remis en question, notre programme économique. Des milliards de roupies ont été investi pour la première fois par un gouvernement dans les allocations aux *self-employed*, et ceux travaillant dans le secteur informel afin d'éviter au maximum des pertes d'emplois.

L'île Maurice n'est pas le seul pays qui se retrouve dans une telle situation. Nous faisons face à une pandémie qui a fait apparaître des défis inédits majeurs. Si je peux m'exprimer ainsi la Covid-19 est la crise mondiale la plus aiguë de notre époque mais depuis l'année dernière, nous avons appris comment diminuer les risques de contamination. Nous avons trouvé des stratégies pour mieux gérer l'impact de la pandémie sur notre économie surtout pendant le confinement. Il nous a fallu repenser toute une stratégie et je pense que ce budget propose des solutions efficaces et équilibrées qui répondent à la fois aux enjeux de santé publique, à une justice sociale et aux besoins économiques de notre pays. Tous les pays du monde font face à ce même dilemme : comment gérer la crise sanitaire avec les obligations régulières de confinement et répondre aux attentes de la population en terme économique et sociale. Malheureusement, M. le président, il faut le reconnaître certains pays connaissent des situations pires que la nôtre, avec des milliers de morts et d'autres qui s'en sortent lentement avec la vaccination. Nous avons apporté des amendements à nos législations afin que la vaccination se fasse en priorité pour le personnel de l'éducation et les services hospitaliers. D'après les informations que j'ai, M. le président, à hier soir, 220,124 personnes ont déjà reçus deux doses de vaccins et 443,201 ont reçu leur première doses de vaccins et c'est très encourageant et comme l'a annoncé l'honorable ministre des Finances, nous prévoyons une première phase d'ouverture de nos frontières le 15 juillet et c'est le contexte local actuellement.

M. le président, je me suis permis de commencer mon discours sur ce point afin que nous tous ici, comprenions la situation critique dans laquelle nous nous trouvons et quelles sont nos priorités. Parce qu'en écoutant les membres de l'opposition, ils veulent donner l'impression à la population que la pandémie est une simple affaire, et que nous nous servons de cette pandémie pour masquer certaines choses dans le pays. Mais non, M. le président. La situation est difficile et il fallait dans le budget apporter un plan pour gérer et répondre aux attentes de la population, mais aussi aux opérateurs économiques de notre pays. Je pense que le ministre des Finances a été très courageux et je salue son courage. C'est la deuxième fois qu'il présente un budget dans des situations d'extrême difficulté et malgré cela, il a eu le

courage, M. le président, de revoir à la hausse des allocations sociales pour les plus démunis de notre société.

M. le président, les deux nouveaux pôles de développement annoncés par le ministre des Finances sont nécessaires pour notre pays : le secteur pharmaceutique et l'économie verte.

M. le président, je vais aborder maintenant deux secteurs dont j'ai la responsabilité, l'énergie et le secteur eau. Mais avant tout, je dois remercier le Premier ministre et le ministre des Finances pour la confiance placée dans la stratégie pour mieux développer le secteur de l'énergie renouvelable pour en faire un pilier de notre économie. Un aspect important du développement du *green economy*, M. le président, et ça c'est fondamental, c'est l'effet positif sur notre environnement. Première responsabilité, et ça s'applique à tous les membres de cette auguste Assemblée mais aussi à la population. Nous avons tous une responsabilité de mieux protéger notre île et de léguer un environnement plus sain aux prochaines générations. Mais nous avons aussi une urgence à respecter notre engagement envers les institutions internationales dans le cadre de L'Accord de Paris de 2015 sur le changement climatique. M. le président, ce nouveau pilier de l'économie du pays jouera un rôle important dans les années à venir. Selon *the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)*, le secteur des énergies renouvelables peut créer le double du nombre d'emplois que celui du secteur conventionnel, c'est-à-dire, la production de l'énergie à partir de l'énergie fossile. L'agence internationale, M. le président, souligne l'importance des énergies renouvelables à pouvoir contribuer au PIB et conséquemment au bien-être d'une population.

M. le président, allons le reconnaître, nous n'avons plus le choix. Nous devons impérativement redoubler d'effort pour atténuer les effets du changement climatique. En tant que petit État insulaire en développement, nous sommes vulnérables aux effets des changements climatiques et qui ont de graves conséquences sur le développement socio-économique de notre pays. M. le président, dans ce budget nous mettons en œuvre un certain nombre de mesures et de projets, afin de respecter les engagements que nous avons pris dans le cadre de L'accord de Paris de 2015 sur le changement climatique. Je l'ai dit plus haut, et l'objectif est de réduire les émissions de gaz à effet de serre du pays de 30 % d'ici 2030. Et là, je salue l'annonce faite par le ministre des Finances sur l'élimination du charbon d'ici 2030, décision extrêmement importante et décision courageuse. Cette décision définitivement, M. le président, nous aidera à réduire beaucoup plus nos émissions de dioxyde de carbone que ce taux de 30 %. M. le président, suite à cette annonce, le plan

d'action, c'est-à-dire, le *Renewable Energy Roadmap* de 2030 pour la production d'électricité à base d'énergies renouvelables sera conséquemment amendé. M. le président, nous n'avons pas de réserve de pétrole ou de gaz ou de charbon, mais nous avons des sources d'énergies renouvelables, en particulier l'énergie solaire, l'hydroélectrique, l'éolien et la biomasse.

M. le président, la décision d'arrêter l'utilisation du charbon est dans une mouvance mondiale. Du reste, l'organisation des États-Unis a récemment fait un appel pour l'élimination complète de l'utilisation du charbon dans le monde d'ici 2040, et ils ont demandé aux banques de mettre fin au financement international des centrales à charbon et de réorienter ses financements vers des projets d'énergies renouvelables. Permettez-moi là des citer un pays et je prends l'exemple de l'Arabie Saoudite, gros producteur de pétrole et qui compte réduire de 50 % leur production d'électricité à partir de l'huile lourde, c'est-à-dire, ils vont produire dans les années à venir 50 % d'énergies renouvelables. Nous avons tout près de nous, l'île sœur, l'île de la Réunion. Nous aussi nous ambitionnons de devenir un gros producteur d'énergie mixte.

M. le président, laissez-moi aborder maintenant un peu tout le côté technique de l'ambition énoncée par ce gouvernement. M. le président, les systèmes électriques dans la plupart des pays développés sont en train de subir d'importants changements et cela est dû principalement à la libéralisation du marché de l'électricité et l'augmentation de la part des énergies renouvelables dans le mix énergétique. La production à base d'énergie renouvelable a toujours existé dans notre réseau de distribution, c'est-à-dire, que ce soit à Maurice, que ce soit à l'étranger, mais jamais la présence d'énergie renouvelable n'a été d'une ampleur aussi importante. Aujourd'hui il faut le constater, M. le président, la situation a changé car la production d'électricité décentralisée augmente d'année en année, mais ce qu'il faudrait comprendre c'est qu'au-delà d'une masse critique, cela peut avoir des conséquences négatives, que ce soit pour les réseaux de transmission et de distribution, ou que ce soit pour les consommateurs. Et cela, s'il y a un impact négatif, cela va définitivement impacter sur les niveaux de tension, sur la fréquence, le fonctionnement des protections, mais la stabilité même et la fiabilité du réseau. Maintenant, pour pouvoir atteindre les 60 % d'énergies renouvelables et nous permettre d'avancer dans notre démarche de démocratisation de la production énergétique, nous allons efficacement utiliser notre réseau intelligent, c'est-à-dire, le *Smart Grid* - je vais faire quelques commentaires un peu plus tard - afin d'optimiser et de coordonner la production, la distribution et la consommation d'électricité. Et en ce faisant, M.

le président, définitivement nous allons améliorer l'efficacité énergétique et la fiabilité de notre réseau électrique.

Autre annonce extrêmement importante, la mise en place d'un *National Biomass Framework*, annoncé dans le budget, est un autre élément important pour notre production énergétique. Cela a pris du temps, plus de temps sous l'ère du Parti travailliste mais c'est chose faite. Dans un premier temps, il y a le prix garanti de R 3.50 le kWh et ce qui est encourageant pour la production de la canne. Et nous rassure surtout sur la bagasse qui est utilisée pour la production de l'électricité.

Maintenant, il est important que de nouvelles sources d'énergie renouvelable soient utilisées pour la production d'électricité. Une première étape a déjà été faite en ce sens. Et je m'explique. Le CEB a lancé un *request for information* pour des centrales hybrides. Je dis bien hybrides. Les investisseurs locaux et étrangers seront ensuite appelés à soumettre leurs propositions. Pourquoi, M. le président, j'ai souligné cet aspect de centrale hybride ? Parce que lors de son intervention, l'honorable Patrick Assirvaden avait remis en question certaines choses concernant la production de l'électricité surtout à partir de l'énergie renouvelable en mentionnant l'aspect de *Firm Power* et l'aspect d'*Intermittent Power*. Etant donné, M. le président, que le charbon est utilisé comme *firm energy*, les sources d'énergie renouvelable destinées à remplacer le charbon devraient également être des *firm energy*.

Maintenant, il existe aujourd'hui, M. le président, des technologies hybrides qui utilisent une combinaison d'éoliennes, de solaire et de batteries pour pouvoir fournir du *firm power* et c'est pour cette raison que le *request for information* lancé par le CEB invite la soumission des projets pour des centrales hybrides afin de surmonter ce problème.

Je l'ai dit un peu plus tôt, M. le président, nous faisons un pas important en avant avec l'élaboration d'un *National Biomass Framework*. Cela va nous assurer en termes de durabilité des autres sources de biomasse pour la production de l'électricité tout le long de l'année à un prix abordable.

Plusieurs études ont été faites pour définir une stratégie pour l'utilisation de la biomasse à Maurice. L'agence Française de développement avec la collaboration de la société Nodalis avait défini des stratégies appropriées pour soutenir le développement de la bioélectricité à Maurice. Le consultant Nodalis a recommandé le développement et l'utilisation d'autres sources de biomasse telles que le bois, les plantations forestières et la

canne à sucre, entre autres. Le prix de la bagasse a déjà été fixé et nous allons maintenant fixer le prix d'autres sources de biomasse.

M. le président, nous nous donnons les moyens pour atteindre l'objectif de 60% d'énergie renouvelable. Nous avons les organisations nécessaires -

- le *CEB* qui produit, achète et distribue l'électricité ;
- la *MARENA* c'est-à-dire le *Mauritius Renewable Energy Agency* qui doit promouvoir l'utilisation des énergies renouvelables et mettre en place les *schemes* et autres facilités requis dans le secteur ;
- l'*URA* c'est-à-dire *l'Utility Regulatory Authority*, l'instance régulatrice qui va réglementer les tarifs d'électricité ;
- l'*EEMO*, *that is, the Energy Efficiency Management Office* qui promeut l'utilisation efficiente de l'énergie, pour le secteur public et privé.

Mais nous avons aussi toute la collaboration et l'expertise des agences internationales pour l'énergie renouvelable

Dans le budget, M. le président, nous avons eu un financement de R5,3 milliards pour la production d'électricité d'énergie renouvelable et, en même temps, une partie de cette dotation va être utilisée par le CEB pour renforcer son réseau.

M. le président, l'une des conditions majeures pour une meilleure intégration de l'énergie renouvelable sur notre réseau concerne l'installation des batteries. Je vais essayer de m'expliquer en des termes simples parce que ce même sujet a été traité par l'honorable Assirvaden lors de son intervention et il s'est mélangé les pinceaux. L'énergie solaire et éolienne sont des sources d'énergies variables et sont affectées par les conditions météorologiques et nous devons installer des batteries afin de corriger ces fluctuations. Dans son intervention, l'honorable Assirvaden fait mention, et je cite -

« En 2017, on est en 2021 dans le budget de l'année dernière dans votre budget, l'honorable Dr. Padayachy, cautionné par le Premier ministre, vous parlez de 2 mW de batterie, l'année dernière vous disiez *commissioning of a battery energy system* de 14 mW, peut-on savoir qu'en est-il de ces batteries, 0 MW, 5 MW, 10 MW; combien de MW a été *commissioned* jusqu'ici ?

M. le président, permettez-moi de dire à la Chambre que nous avons déjà installé 4 MW de batterie. Ces batteries sont déjà en service. Ce stockage est suffisant pour la production actuelle de 104 MW d'énergies solaires. Le *CEB* a déjà commencé la mise en

route de batteries additionnelles de 14 MW. 10 de ces 14 MW seront opérationnelles le mois prochain et je comprends que les 4 autres mW seront opérationnelles en septembre 2021. C'est-à-dire au mois de septembre de 2021, nous aurons 14 plus 4, 18 MW installées et opérationnelles. Et un exercice d'appels d'offres a déjà été enclenché pour l'installation de 20 autres mW de batteries. C'est-à-dire que si j'ajoute les 20 au 18, ça fait 38 et le budget actuel fait provision de 40 MW de batteries. C'est-à-dire qu'à l'année prochaine on va être tout près des 40 MW annoncés dans le budget de cette année-ci.

Avec ces projets, M. le président, nous allons assurer la stabilité et la fiabilité du réseau et une plus grande pénétration de l'énergie renouvelable. Dans le même souffle et ça aussi ça a été mentionné par l'honorable Patrick Assirvaden dans son intervention, le CEB investit dans le rehaussement de son réseau avec la construction des postes de transmission et de distribution et cela, afin de pouvoir interconnecter les projets d'énergie renouvelable et le système sera digitalisé. Et c'est pourquoi on appelle cela *the smart grid*. Maintenant, je vais donner quelques informations concernant la construction de ces dix postes de transmission et de distribution. Les dix postes devront être mises en opération dès que possible, non-seulement pour rendre les réseaux *smart* mais aussi pour permettre l'interconnexion.

Il est à noter, M. le président, que la soumission des six *GIS substations* a été lancé en 2018 par le *CPB*, mais qu'elle avait été annulée car aucun des soumissionnaires n'a pu répondre aux spécifications. Un autre exercice d'appel d'offres sera lancé mais le *CPB* évalue actuellement un appel d'offres qui avait été lancé pour trois autres *GIS substations*.

M. le président, l'énergie solaire est une des meilleures sources d'énergie renouvelable à Maurice. Nous avons fait du progrès dans ce domaine. A ce jour, nous avons 104 mW de panneau photovoltaïque installé. Maintenant, je pense que là aussi, il y a eu confusion dans l'intervention de M. Patrick Assirvaden concernant une ferme flottante, solaire de 2mW à *Tamarind Falls* et un parc solaire de 2mW à *Henrietta*. Pour le parc solaire de 2mW à *Tamarind Falls*, nous avons des problèmes techniques. Il faudra amender les spécifications pour prendre en considération les vents cycloniques qui s'abattent sur Maurice mais par contre, pour la ferme solaire à *Henrietta*, nous avons 2MW qui est déjà opérationnelle et le contrat pour l'extension à 10mW a déjà été alloué à la firme indienne BHEL, c'est-à-dire *Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd*. Le projet sera opérationnel en août 2022.

Le *CEB*, M. le président, compte lancer prochainement *a request for proposal* pour trois fermes photovoltaïques de 10MW chacune et à travers la *DBM*, le gouvernement investit

de son côté, une somme de R 650 millions pour l'installation des panneaux solaires photovoltaïques sur les bâtiments publics et les institutions scolaires.

M. le président, permettez-moi de dire quelques mots sur le concept de Maurice Ile Durable car certains membres du Parti travailliste ont évoqué ce projet. M. le président, je voudrais rapporter certains faits sur les différents programmes des différents gouvernements quant à la production de l'énergie renouvelable et ce n'est nullement une opinion.

M. le président, il y a une différence fondamentale dans la politique énergétique du Parti Travailliste et celui du MSM. Nous proposons un projet réaliste et réalisable. Je vais relater les faits basés sur des rapports et vous allez comprendre ce que je vais partager avec la Chambre. Ils nous ont accusés d'avoir, si je peux, reprendre les mots de l'honorable Osman Mahomed, concernant le projet Maurice Ile Durable, and *this is what he had to say* –

“In the past, the actual Prime Minister has said, kot monn foter?”

*I would like to ask the same question tonight: Kot la Commission Maurice Ile Durable inn foter? What was wrong with Maurice Ile Durable? Was it because it was set up under the vision of Dr. Navin Chandra Ramgoolam or was it, I was at the head of it? Nullement, M. le député. Le projet Maurice Ile Durable était mort dès sa naissance. Je me réfère à l'interview donnée par le Professeur Joël de Rosnay et il est clair dans ce qu'il dit, M. le président. Permettez-moi de me référer à l'interview de Professeur Joël de Rosnay, le 3 septembre 2017 au journal *l'Express*. On lui pose la question –*

« Pourquoi MID a fini dans le mur? »

Et il répond –

« Les explications sont multiples. Le manque de vision politique, la lenteur de l'administration, la difficulté de la prise des décisions compte tenu du nombre de ministres impliqués, la pression des lobbies, les poids des habitudes ont joué, le gouvernement n'a pas su impliquer, mobiliser, responsabiliser les mauriciens sur leur avenir énergétique. »

Et il vient ajouter –

« Un leader écologique aurait fait du bien. Il n'a pas émergé. »

Ça aurait pu être vous, l'honorable Osman Mahomed, mais vous n'avez pas émergé. Voilà la triste réalité du projet MID et ce qui est plus fondamentale, M. le président. Et là, permettez-moi de m'expliquer. Il y a eu avec le Maurice Ile Durable concept, un rapport et

je pense que l'honorable Osman Mahomed a fait mention de ce rapport, un gros rapport de 86 pages de ce *working group*. Et ce *working group* préconisait l'arrêt de l'utilisation du charbon en 2040. Nous, nous avons mis comme objectif l'arrêt du charbon en 2030. Pourquoi? Il faut expliquer pourquoi. Eux aussi, ils savaient ça. Parce que le dernier contrat pour l'utilisation du charbon avec les *IPPs*, arrive à terme en 2027.

Maintenant, pourquoi ils n'ont pas fixé l'arrêt du charbon, eux? Et, là, on se pose des questions. Certains parmi nous étaient au Parlement parce qu'ils voulaient continuer avec les procédures pour la mise en place du projet *CT Power*. Comment allaient-ils faire s'ils avaient mis une date ou une année pour l'arrêt du charbon? Ils voulaient non seulement avancer de l'avant avec ce projet, mais c'était un projet qui prévoyait une production de l'électricité à partir du charbon ; un projet de 110 MW, M. le président. Et c'est là, la première contradiction dans votre politique énergétique. Maintenant, fut un moment, il fallait sortir de cette impasse parce qu'avec le nombre des questions, je me rappelle bien, le Leader de l'Opposition d'alors, l'honorable Paul Bérenger, avait posées. Et là, ils ont mis sur pied ce qu'on appelait à l'époque, la *National Energy Commission*. Et si vous regardez les attributions de cette *National Energy Commission*, *parce qu'avant le National Energy Commission*, c'était le ministre de tutelle, l'honorable Rashid Beebejaun qui avait cette responsabilité là et tout d'un coup, arrive la *National Energy Commission*, présidée par l'actuel *Financial Secretary*, qui était à ce moment-là *Senior Adviser* et les termes de références de cette commission, c'était –

- *to review national energy requirements,*
- *advise Government and other authorities concerned in the planning and execution of major projects in the Energy sector to fully meet medium and long term needs,* et le dernier
- *oversee the operation of the MID fund.*

C'est à dire que tout ce qui concerne le *MID* est sorti sous tutelle du ministre de l'Énergie et des Utilités publiques de l'époque pour aller sous cette commission. Et par la suite, la commission vient avec son rapport, je pense que c'est en 2013 si je ne me trompe pas, mais rien n'a été implanté. Aucune des recommandations de ce rapport n'a été implantée.

M. le président, tout ce que j'ai dit vienne démontrer toute la différence en ce qui concerne la politique énergétique entre le gouvernement et le Parti travailliste.

M. le président, les annonces du budget viennent me rassurer, pas seulement en tant que politicien, mais en tant que citoyen. Nous devons tout faire pour mettre en place cet objectif de 60 %. Le budget prévoit des facilités additionnelles pour les mauriciens pour pourvoir produire l'électricité pour leurs propres consommations. La Banque de développement donnera des facilités avec un taux d'intérêt préférentiel de 2 % pour des emprunts allant jusqu'à R 100,000 roupies pour l'achat d'équipement pour la production d'énergie solaire.

En même temps, le *CEB* de son côté va poursuivre son programme d'installation des *home solar kits* pour ménages à faible revenu mais aussi du *distributed generation schemes* pour divers secteurs de la population.

Une autre étape dans notre programme de décarbonisation, c'est-à-dire afin d'atteindre la neutralité carbone, concerne une plus grande utilisation des véhicules électriques et c'est un phénomène qui se répand actuellement de par le monde. Le ministère avait commandité une étude sur un plan d'action pour l'intégration de ces véhicules dans notre parc automobile. Nous avons rendu ce rapport public. Plusieurs pays, M. le président, adoptent ce mode de transport et diminuent leur consommation en carburant. Comme je l'ai souligné, nous voulons inciter les mauriciens, non seulement à produire leur propre énergie mais aussi à produire pour recharger leur voiture électrique et exporter la quantité d'électricité excédante sur le réseau du *CEB*.

Les points de recharge pour les véhicules électriques, M. le président, seront installés à travers l'île. Les opérateurs du privé seront aussi appelés à y participer dans un cadre défini. J'ai lu tout récemment dans un journal, les commentaires venant des opérateurs d'autobus, nous comprenons que nous sommes dans une phase difficile avec la Covid-19, mais les opérateurs d'autobus devront s'adapter à ces changements. Ils n'ont pas le choix, M. le président.

M. le président, j'ai mentionné la biomasse pour remplacer le charbon, ensuite l'énergie solaire, l'éolienne est le troisième potentiel de production d'énergie renouvelable. *Onshore*, c'est-à-dire si l'installation est à terre et *offshore si c'est en mer*. M. le président un parc éolien de 9.35MW est opérationnel depuis quelque temps dans le nord-est de l'île mais d'autres régions peuvent accommoder cette technologie. Toutefois, je dois le reconnaître, ça a été mentionné par les membres de l'Opposition, nous avons accumulé du retard dans ce secteur à la suite de l'annulation du projet d'un parc éolien à Plaine Sophie et nous savons

tous pourquoi nous avons dû annuler ce projet. Pour rattraper ce retard, M. le président, le *CEB* lancera les procédures d'appels d'offres pour un parc éolien de 40MW qui sera opérationnel en 2024.

M. le président, de nombreux scientifiques et ingénieurs respectés dans le monde entier ont fait valoir que les océans peuvent contribuer à l'abandon des combustibles fossiles à l'échelle mondiale et peuvent changer la donne, en particulier pour les petits états insulaires en développement.

À l'avenir un autre élément important de la nouvelle feuille de route 2030 pour le secteur de l'électricité sera l'éolienne *offshore*. L'éolienne *offshore* peut nous aider à avancer vite dans le secteur de l'énergie renouvelable. La production d'énergie éolienne *offshore* est utilisée massivement en France, au Royaume-Unis, en Ecosse, en Norvège mais aussi aux Etats-Unis, au Japon et à Singapour. Nous allons solliciter l'expertise et l'expérience de ces pays.

Mais pour pourvoir avancer, nous allons apporter incessamment des amendements aux législations pour permettre l'investissement afin de développer ce potentiel d'énergie marine et le *offshore wind energy*.

M. le président, la mise en chantier du *green economy* demande aussi le personnel qualifié. Nous savons tous que le développement socio-économique s'est fait grâce aux centaines de milliers d'employés mauriciens. Le textile, le tourisme, le service financier se sont développés grâce au savoir-faire et à la formation des mauriciens.

M. le président, le *CEB* est réputé en termes de ressources humaines qualifiées et cela à plusieurs niveaux. Toutefois, nous abordons un autre type de production d'énergie et le budget 2021/2022, donne les moyens à la formation de nos jeunes pour s'adapter à ce domaine, qui est nouveau pour beaucoup. Le centre de formation et de perfectionnement professionnel du *CEB* sera accrédité par les autorités pour donner des cours de formation dans le domaine de l'énergie renouvelable et l'efficacité énergétique. Ce centre apportera une contribution considérable dans la création de *green jobs* à l'île Maurice.

Permettez-moi maintenant, M. le président, d'aborder le secteur de l'eau à Maurice. La gestion de l'eau reste et restera, M. le président, un épineux problème pour tous gouvernements, non seulement à Maurice, mais à travers le monde et cela est dû au changement climatique. Les défis dans le secteur de l'eau dans le pays sont multiples, d'autant plus qu'on est soumis à la pression incessante des effets néfastes du changement

climatique et je cite le dernier exemple, M. le président, cela concerne des inondations qui ont affectées les régions du sud, du sud-est et le centre de l'île alors qu'à cette même période, d'autres régions de l'île étaient restées à sec.

M. le président, bien que nous bénéficiions de précipitations chaque année, nous faisons face à une insuffisance en eau dans certains endroits plus que d'autres et cela est dû à une répartition temporelle et spatiale. Des périodes sèches qui se ressentent de plus en plus pendant les mois secs, du mois de septembre au mois de décembre.

Nous avons connu une période de sécheresse prolongée et des précipitations de forte intensité sur une courte durée au cours des deux dernières décennies, comme ce fut le cas au cours des mois d'été de l'année dernière, ce qui a entraîné des perturbations dans le service d'approvisionnement en eau.

M. le président, à cet égard, j'ai jugé nécessaire de repenser sérieusement le développement du secteur pour remédier à la période sèche. Des nouvelles stratégies ont été élaborées pour permettre de relever les défis de la meilleure façon possible. Ces nouvelles stratégies consistent à l'élaboration d'une feuille de route pour 2021-2024, afin d'améliorer les services d'approvisionnement pendant la période sèche.

La stratégie, M. le président, préconise, entre autres –

- a) une interconnexion du système d'approvisionnement au niveau de chacune des six zones géographiques ;
- b) l'amélioration des installations de traitement et la construction des nouvelles unités de traitement, et
- c) la construction des digues à travers les rivières et l'installation des filtres à pression qui vont filtrer et traiter l'eau avant de l'injecter dans le réseau de distribution. Nous avons déjà en service 40 de ces filtres à pression qui opèrent depuis 2009, et 11 filtres additionnels seront installés dans les mois à venir. Ce budget prévoit l'installation de 18 autres filtres à pression à travers l'île.

M. le président, pour la première fois, nous allons exploiter des sources d'eau supplémentaires provenant de l'eau des centrales hydrauliques du CEB à des fins potables après le traitement nécessaire. À cet égard, une somme de R 5 millions a été prévue pour l'exercice en cours, c'est-à-dire, l'exercice budgétaire 2021-2022, afin de lancer l'étude de faisabilité pour utiliser l'eau de la centrale hydraulique de Ferney. Sur cet aspect, je dois

souligner qu'un premier projet de ce type a déjà été complété à Magenta Falls afin d'approvisionner une partie de la région Sud-Ouest où on avait des problèmes de distribution d'eau assez important.

Autre mesure qu'on avait annoncé pendant la période sèche, c'est-à-dire, que nous devons investir pour un meilleur captage, avoir une meilleure conservation de nos ressources en eau. Du reste, M. le président, l'une des mesures annoncées dans le budget, concerne les opérateurs de *car wash*. Ces opérateurs vont bénéficier des facilités d'emprunt de la *DBM* pour revoir leurs opérations. Ils devront capter l'eau de pluie ou mettre en pratique d'autres types de lavage, minimisant l'utilisation de l'eau potable.

M. le président, je souhaiterais maintenant aborder un sujet qui a fait polémique lors des interventions des membres de l'opposition et cela concerne le barrage de Rivière des Anguilles, surtout sur le coût de ce barrage.

M. le président, laissez-moi relater l'historique de ce barrage pour pouvoir comprendre comment on en est arrivé où on est. Le gouvernement de 2005 à 2010, c'est-à-dire, le gouvernement d'alors, du Parti travailliste et du PMSD, avait lancé un appel d'offres pour un consultant pour la réalisation d'une étude de faisabilité pour le projet d'approvisionnement en eau dans le sud de Maurice. Et, ce consultant était *Lahmeyer International*. Ce contrat fut signé en 2007 et l'étude de faisabilité comprenait deux phases : la première phase était une étude de base pour la demande en eau dans le Sud et la deuxième était d'identifier l'option la plus appropriée pour répondre à la demande d'eau dans le Sud jusqu'à 2050.

Dans le cadre de la première phase de l'étude, le consultant avait identifié trois sites potentiels et sur la base de l'évaluation, avait recommandé, dans son rapport, remis en juillet 2008, le site de Rivière des Anguilles. La phase 2 avait consisté en des études plus détaillées. Des études géologiques et géotechniques approfondies, y compris une conception préliminaire.

D'après le rapport de l'étude du consultant *Lahmeyer International*, soumis en 2009, les travaux de construction du barrage de Rivière des Anguilles devaient coûter environ R 2,5 milliards mais le montant total du projet était estimé à R 3,4 milliards car elle comprenait aussi une station de traitement d'eau, un réseau de canalisations et des réservoirs de service.

Un appel d'offres avait été lancé en janvier 2011 et alloué en mars 2012 pour le *design and construction of the project*. La firme Coyne and Bellier avait été sélectionnée par

le *Central Procurement Board*. Toutefois - nous connaissons l'histoire - ce contrat avait ensuite dû être résilié du fait que la firme Coyne and Bellier avait travaillé sur le projet du barrage de Bagatelle et n'avait pas soumis un travail satisfaisant. Entretemps, ce qu'il faudrait savoir, le gouvernement avait eu un prêt 62,5 millions d'euros, c'est-à-dire, d'un montant de R 4,5 milliards de l'Agence française de développement. Mais, malheureusement, comme c'est le cas souvent avec un gouvernement Travailliste, ce prêt avait été annulé du fait qu'il avait accusé trop de retard pour l'implémentation de ce projet.

Subséquemment, M. le président, tout l'exercice a été refait et un nouveau consultant nommé en octobre 2017, vous réalisez, des années après, un appel d'offres lancé par le *Central Procurement Board* pour la conception du barrage et la supervision de sa construction. Et c'était la firme italienne Studio Ing. G. Pietrangeli Srl, qui avait été choisie et a démarré ses travaux en janvier 2018.

Le *preliminary basic design* du barrage a été fait en 2018-2019.

D'autres études géophysiques, géologiques et géotechniques plus poussées, recommandées par le consultant ont été dument complétées afin de déterminer les caractéristiques du sol et les résultats de toutes les investigations avant la conception finale du barrage, et là aussi, nous savons tous ce qui s'est passé concernant le barrage de Bagatelle en termes d'études géophysiques, géologiques et géotechniques. Maintenant, les *detailed designs* ont été préparés et soumis en décembre 2020 et le consultant a également soumis un *revised cost estimate*. M. le président, c'est pourquoi on a eu un montant l'année dernière et ce montant a été revu à la hausse dans ce présent budget. Pourquoi ? Je m'explique. À la suite de la conception détaillée, plusieurs changements nécessaires ont été apportés à la structure du barrage, et je vais élaborer sur ces changements rapidement –

1. Le déversoir de type Ogee, initialement prévu à l'étape de faisabilité, a été remplacé par un *spillway* du type '*morning glory*' ainsi qu'un *spillway* d'urgence, et cela en tenant compte des aspects géologiques et hydrauliques prévalant sur le site.
2. Il y aura dans ce barrage une galerie d'inspection. Cette galerie n'était pas prévue au stade de l'étude de faisabilité mais par la suite, le consultant a recommandé la construction d'une galerie d'un km de long, et en particulier le long de la section la plus profonde du barrage, afin de permettre une inspection régulière en vue d'assurer la sûreté et la sécurité de la structure du barrage.

3. Le consultant a aussi recommandé un *cut-off wall* et ça en fonction des conditions géologiques sur le site et l'épaisseur de cette paroi est sortie de 0.6 à 1 mètre, c'est-à-dire, une augmentation de 40 cms.
4. M. le président, selon la conception détaillée, la pente du barrage a été aplatie pour une meilleure stabilité. Ainsi, le volume de remblais de roches a augmenté à environ 3 millions de m³.

Il y a aussi à l'étape de la conception de base, le consultant avait proposé un barrage en remblai avec revêtement en béton. Toutefois, après avoir effectué des études géologiques et géotechniques détaillées, le consultant a recommandé un parement en bitume qui est plus souple que le parement rigide en béton. Et il y a eu en dernier lieu, M. le président, l'alignement de la route A9. C'est-à-dire une déviation d'environ 650 mètres sur la rive gauche du barrage et le coût associé à ce réalignement a été insérée dans l'estimation de cette année-ci. Et puis il y a eu l'augmentation des coûts de construction.

Mais, M. le président, la polémique a surgie parce qu'on disait que le barrage avait été, allons dire, budgété à R 3,4 millions et voilà que dans ce budget ça a considérablement augmenté. J'ai donné les raisons mais il faut prendre en considération aussi le taux de change. De 2008 à 2020, l'euro qui est actuellement à R 47; 10 ans de cela, elle était à R 40.

(Interruptions)

R 50 ?

M. le président, je précise que la dotation budgétaire allouée de R 9,4 milliards comprend aussi et ce n'était pas le cas pour la construction de Bagatelle Dam, une station de traitement d'eau de 50,000 mètres cube.

Et voilà, M. le président, j'espère que j'ai éclairé la Chambre sur l'augmentation du budget en ce qui concerne la construction du barrage de Rivière des Anguilles. Mais je dois aussi informer avant de terminer, M. le président, sur ce barrage, que nous allons installer une centrale hydraulique d'une capacité de 110 à 160 kilowatt sur ce barrage.

M. le président, je l'ai dit un peu plus tôt, que ce soit le Sud, le Sud-Est où le Sud-Ouest sont très affectés en ce qui concerne la fourniture d'eau et il est nécessaire d'améliorer le niveau d'approvisionnement dans ces parties de l'île. Par exemple, dans le Sud-Est de l'île, il y a une étude de faisabilité qui a déjà été réalisée; 34,000 personnes sont concernées et on va y construire un *service réservoirs* de 4,000 mètres cubes à Pont Lardier afin d'augmenter

le stockage d'eau. Mais nous allons aussi, toute à travers l'île construire 6 autres *service reservoirs*. Nous comptons aussi utiliser ce qu'on appelle les *inflatable reservoirs* qui seront mobile afin de répondre à des demandes urgentes dans des régions affectées.

M. le président, l'une des failles de la distribution d'eau à Maurice et par rapport au *non-revenue water*. C'est vrai qu'on remplace les vieux tuyaux chaque année, mais il faut d'autres mesures pour diminuer le pourcentage de perte du réservoir aux consommateurs. Nous travaillons afin de trouver des solutions. La *CWA* doit pouvoir s'adapter aux nouvelles technologies.

L'Agence française de développement finance la *CWA* pour des études sur un système de télémétrie. Ces études concernent la mesure à distance et la journalisation des informations des réseaux de la *CWA*. Dans cette même optique, nous comptons remplacer 25,000 compteurs conventionnels par des compteurs intelligents et surtout pour les gros consommateurs.

M. le président, je pèse mes mots pour le paragraphe suivant. La *CWA* devra être plus proactive afin de répondre à la demande de la population. Nous avons mis en place un *Flying Squad* dans chaque zone de distribution pour résoudre les problèmes liés à la fourniture de l'eau. Nous avons également mis sur pied un système de *roster* parce que, je pense que tout le monde sait, qu'au niveau de la *CWA* dans le passé, arrivé à 4 heures, il n'y avait plus de service de dépannage. Alors, nous avons mis un système de *roster* au niveau du personnel pour assurer une intervention plus prompte au problème.

M. le président, nous allons réformer la *CWA* pour la rendre plus productive et efficace afin de répondre aux aspirations de la population. Elle deviendra dans les années à venir une organisation à la pointe de la technologie. M. le président, la réforme a déjà commencé.

Je vais conclure, M. le président. M. le président, nous voulons l'efficience à tous les niveaux dans les organisations tombant sous ma responsabilité. Le respect des délais d'implémentation est primordial. Et une synergie de différentes institutions sera importante pour atteindre la vision de ce gouvernement.

M. le président, il est dit dans ce budget que le Premier ministre va présider un comité afin de suivre tous les projets. M. le président, je suis optimiste de nature. Je suis confiant. Et au sein de mon ministère les officiers travaillent assidûment afin d'atteindre les objectifs dans

le secteur de l'eau et de l'énergie. Et, M. le président, permettez-moi de saisir cette occasion pour les remercier tous.

M. le président, nous n'aspirons pas au repos, nous sommes des bâtisseurs.

Pour conclure, M. le président, c'est un budget qui a été présenté dans un contexte très difficile. Notre population a dû faire d'énormes sacrifices. Le gouvernement a rempli son rôle afin de soutenir autant que possible notre population et les acteurs de l'économie.

Permettez-moi de terminer avec une phrase chère à notre regretté, Sir Anerood Jugnauth. C'est avec de la discipline et une culture de travail assidue que nous pourrons avancer. C'est ensemble que nous allons avancer, M. le président. J'en ai terminé, M. le président.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(8.08 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me, first of all, extend my appreciation and warm congratulations to my friends from the rank and file of the Labour Party who have intervened. They have intervened very forcefully and they have lived up to the expectation of Parliament, of the Party and the People. And what is true for Members of the Labour Party is equally true for our friends sitting on the Opposition bench, and I say the same thing to our friends on Government bench.

I made it a point to listen, and I listened very intently. And I can infer that there is a common theme in relation to speeches delivered, with a common thread, and I will call it 'uncertainty'. And the level of uncertainty is constantly on the rise. It is up to us, as and when required, to put up a common front to ward off the threats. But, at the same time, there are opportunities knocking. And I recall when I was asked by the Prime Minister to have an interaction and an interface meeting on the issue of COVID, at that time, the infection was raging despite warnings issued to Government, and we made our position very clear that what appears to be an epidemic is becoming a pandemic. And we acted in good faith and we conveyed the message of a responsible Opposition. But much to our disappointment, the Prime Minister did not pay heed to what we had to say.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, challenges are becoming more daunting and it is in the spirit of warding off the threats that we need to say loud and clear what are the facts, what are the

merits of this Budget, what needs to be done and how are we going to address the problems which not only are looking at us but the writings are on the walls.

There is no need to look for devils in the details, but what I expect a responsible Government to do is to state facts, nothing but the facts and the figures, and not come up with figures just to please our friends sitting on the opposite side. It is not because one hails from Government bench that one can manipulate figures; that figures should be deceptive and accounting should be creative accounting and deceptive accounting.

It is the reason why I want to tell, through you, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, time to disclose, time to spell out the truth, time to say what the situation is, what is the economic and fiscal status of our country. We may hide facts; we may try to dilly-dally; we may be best at figs, but, somehow, somewhere, somebody will call our bluff, and we do not have to go on Mount Everest to know that Government is bluffing, and I intend to call the bluff of this Government. I feel sorry to say that the hon. Minister has made a false start despite, perhaps, his apparent goodwill.

A Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, based on deceptive and creative accounting has far-reaching consequences at domestic level and vis-à-vis financial institutions. I am sorry to say that it is the moral compass that has broken. I have listened to speeches and this is what has been said in respect of institutions, in respect of separation of powers, in respect of sound management. On all grounds and at all levels, this Government has failed. It has not only failed, but it has failed abysmally.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are a rule-based country and we have to honour our commitments. You have been ambassador to Egypt and to Washington, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I am sure you know the meaning and relevance of rule-based because when you are from a country which is hailed or was hailed as a country where there is rule of law and where there is decency, you comply; you do not run away; you live up to the expectation of institutions. And one should not forget that today - so was it yesterday and so will it be tomorrow - we will be under the constant gaze of institutions like the Financial Action Task Force, Bretton Woods institutions, and also we will be under the gaze of countries which put a lot of premium upon democracy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we know what has been the outcome of the report that has been circulated on fraud and corruption. And on corruption index, it is sad to say that Mauritius is flying with great colours. And what is the Budget all about, Mr Speaker, Sir? Facts and

figures, proper audit and proper accounting. But a Budget has to establish a road map and we have to know where we are, where we will go, when our frontiers will open, when we will cross frontiers, and when we will establish cross-border initiative.

What is the hon. Minister hoping? What are his expectations? He is pinning a lot of hope on Public Sector Investment Programme. Is it going to drive the economy? I doubt it. I am not saying that it is doubtful, but Government is doubtful. Why? Because it is shying away from harsh realities. And you have to live up, which you don't, to the expectation of the people. What they want from you is nothing and everything in respect of truth, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let me come to the Director of Audit. The Director of Audit, everybody has flashed, flogged and flagged the findings of the Audit Report; my good friend, hon. Ritesh Ramful and hon. Aadil Ameer Meea citing or referring page and paragraph. I have here, Mr Speaker, Sir, investment not yielding any return since acquisition. What it says, Mr Speaker, Sir? It says that Government has failed, failed abysmally and has not lived up to the expectation of people. At the end of the day, it is the people of this country who pay taxes; it is the people of this country who work hard; it is the people of this country who cast their vote and, of course, they have a responsibility, but Government also has obligation *vis-à-vis* the people; where there are rights, there are obligations.

Let me refer to one specific company, the Mauritius Africa Fund Ltd, and nothing has been mentioned in the Budget except that we know for certain the ways and means that the Mauritius Africa Fund will implement the project that it has been nurtured. And we know how they are going to bypass procedures and there will be what we call *triangage légal*. But then, let me refer to the Director of Audit. What does he say? He says that in relation to the Budget, year in, year out, the Budget is becoming increasingly a Budget centred on off-budgetary expenditure, special extra budgetary fund and equities. When you compute the figure, 15% of total consolidated expenditure amount to Rs26 billion, which is transferred or hidden in Special Funds, and these Rs26 billion are shielded from public view.

This is taxpayers' money; this is hard earned cash, and it is not a nation which has looted, but it is a nation which is honouring its obligation. But is Government complying or fulfilling the rights of a nation, Mr Speaker, Sir? And what is worse, not only wrong signals are being sent, but it is a departure from established norms. When a request is made by the Director of Audit for details relating to expenditure, what does he get? Extracts! And despite

his legitimate request to have all relevant information, most of the time his request falls on deaf ears.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking of somebody who is a holder of a constitutional post. The question that begs an answer: for how long will the political of the Executive act as if this country is its belonging? For how long will you act as if you have the numbers and, therefore, everything is allowed? This is a country which is rule-based, where there is rule of law and there is separation of powers. And what is the outcome when there is no separation of powers, when there is overlapping, when there is blurring? The answer, my friends on the other side, is institutional crisis. This is what they want to do: provoke a situation which would make the life of the Director of Audit difficult; trying to undermine him; denying him of not only his basic rights but the right to have the best people working in the Director of Audit's Office.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned earlier of broken moral compass. I now come to the Audit Report which, again, the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development has not mentioned in his Budget Speech, as corrective actions need to be taken on this Report. I am rather disappointed, but I am not the only one who is disappointed; the whole country is disappointed because there is a thirst for transparency and accountability. And if Government does not convey the right signals, be careful that you are probably unleashing a situation which will not be conducive, and that may lead to a dissent, into social chaos. It is not by living in your ivory tower that you think everything is allowed and permissible. And what does the Chief Audit Executive tell us? The Chief Audit Executive unrolls the relentless observation of an outdated regime, riddled with bad governance, with amateurism and fraudulent practices. Although the Audit Report is courteous, those who have read previous Audit Reports will have no difficulty in comparing the extent of irregularities and waste of public funds and largesse.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Director of Audit who holds a constitutional post, is denied his basic rights, how will institutions function? If he is not allowed to conduct proper audit of institutions, how will they deliver? And yet, we have the guts to talk of competitiveness, of efficiency. But if the Office of the Audit is not daring and does not say things as they are, I am sorry to say, then it is the Ministry of Finance which is wholly responsible. And the problem with the Ministry of Finance, it thinks it can rule the waves, I am sure with the blessing of the Prime Minister. I do not know much about fiscal dominance, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we know that the Ministry of Finance has a stronghold on the functioning of the Bank of

Mauritius. The independence of the Central Bank is one of perception rather than reality. And perception and reality in this case is not a mirror image of each other.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will focus on trends in economic indicators and demonstrate that the figures submitted by the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development are misleading. Unemployment has been well explained by hon. Shakeel Mohamed, and many of the arguments put forward by Members of the Government have been rebutted forcefully by the Opposition. There is a resurgence of inflation which is hurting the consumers badly. Hon. Michael Sik Yuen came with a shopping list to remind us of the undue hardship borne by the population. But what is more important in a country which was cited as a showcase, a model of democracy and rule of law? Confidence, Mr Speaker, Sir. And in times of need and when we have to face uncertainty, Government has to send the right signals. But Government is mired in controversy; Government is responsible for the economic morass; Government does not understand the meaning of morality. And if we do not tread cautiously, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated earlier, the signals we are sending will not be positive, because unless there is positiveness, unless the climate becomes conducive, and there is no better time to do it when we are facing undue hardship. This is the time to look for any lining in any silver cloud, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why I say it is sad that at a time when we needed to get our act together, to have an established roadmap, to see how best we can get all our friends on our side to remodel Mauritius, to revisit this country, and to come back as a model of law and democracy, unfortunately, this climate of uncertainty is persisting and it is getting worse. So, I am not surprised that confidence is eroded and investment is low; both private and public investment. And what are we told? Rs158 billion have been earmarked to be released by the Bank of Mauritius, out of which 60 billion already credited for Consolidation Fund since April 2020. And if I can dispense an advice to the Minister Finance, Economic Planning and Development, through you again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would simply tell him not to fly the supersonic jet, which, for security and safety of public finances, it is much easier to pilot a helicopter. And I will tell him to go for helicopter money to avoid a financial crash; cruise and not crash, Mr Speaker, Sir.

But what is Government telling us? They are having recourse to non-conventional measures. But non-conventional measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, do not mean that we have to turn the Bank of Mauritius into an automatic teller machine or an on tap delivery. As I say, I do not know much about fiscal dominance, but it is crystal clear, in the light of statement

previously issued by the Bank of Mauritius, they had to reverse the decision simply because some of them, much to my regret, and I have to say it, have become errand boys or girls of this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I talk of non-conventional measures, these measures do not mean that there should be a raid on the Bank. The IMF, the World Bank, Moody's credit rating and Mo Ibrahim Index on good governance have issued note of caution. We have to err on the principle of caution if our concern is life and livelihood.

Unemployment, Mr Speaker, Sir, is rife; inflation is escalating, and chances of stagflation are real; unemployment and sluggish economic growth. It is to be noted that private investment is at 12% of the GDP and has to reach at least 20% to create gainful employment. Nothing has been mentioned on inflation and its impact on pension and consumption.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, COVID is still of concern despite what Government is saying and whether Government is too daring to open the frontiers, but I hope that by the time the frontiers are open, we will reach herd immunity. And I hope all sanitary measures will be followed or adhered to. But let me come to the concern, which has become a concern of G7 and, in fact, G7 has been criticised by the former UK Prime Minister for failing to react and for failure to act promptly and they have delayed the process, and not only the UK Prime Minister but others have told them very bluntly that things should have happened at a speedier rate. What does the G7 say? The G7 is supporting a global surveillance system to protect immunisation programme by detecting vaccine-resistant variants before they have a chance to spread.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the first crisis. In 2007 and 2009, the world faced the most severe economic crisis, known as the global financial crisis, and it was compounded by the food, feed and fuel, and they have called it the triple F, Mr Speaker, Sir. And as a small economy, we pulled together and had the resilience to overcome. We were a showcase of recovery and at the Africa Growth Opportunity Meeting held in Nairobi in April 2009, Mauritius was cited as a success story. I attended the meeting and Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary, referred to us as a success model.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the leadership of Dr. Navin Ramgoolam was praised, and it was not praised by the Members of the Labour Party but by Heads of States, and I was there and I canvassed it. This was the time also when Pravind Jugnauth and late Sir Anerood Jugnauth

sought the full support of Navin Ramgoolam and Labour Party at the by-election in Constituency No. 8 in March 2009, and I could still see Pravind Jugnauth waving the red Labour flag. And Mr Speaker, Sir, his victory paved the way to the Labour Party/MSM/PMSD alliance for the 2010 Election; the rest is history. And I recall I was with the then Prime Minister attending a Commonwealth Summit in Trinidad and I spoke my mind in relation to this alliance, and we know what the outcome had been.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come back to what I would call the main thrust of the speech. And like all of us, we meet people, we exchange information, we interact, we interface, we talk to people from main street, side street, backstreet, traders, students, unemployed, accountants, retirees, employees in textile and garment factories, and we meet our friends working in the agricultural sector, you name it, and there is one common reply: no one wants to be a square peg in a round hole. And some are even saying, 'lock them up', after the ruling of the Privy Council that STC acted illegally to rescind the contract of affreightment entered with Betamax. As my friend, hon. Ramful has stated, the ruling of the Privy Council is full and final. You can debate endlessly within the perimeter of your four walls, you can shout from every rooftop, but the ruling of the Privy Council is full and final. The damages award to aggrieved party is Rs6 billion as at date, but what you forgot, or what you forgot to say, or probably you forgot to say also, is that we are signatory to an International Arbitration Agreement like the New York Convention, and the ruling of the Arbitration is persuasive. Our law on International Arbitration Act is based on the UNCITRAL Model Law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, that Bill was voted and promulgated in January 2009, and we all know that the choice of arbitrators is consensual. So, do not give the impression that it is lopsided and that any decision taken by arbitration is not persuasive. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not here to say whether Government should or should not have referred the case to the Supreme Court after the ruling of the Singapore International Arbitration Court, but I reiterate that the last Court of Appeal is the Privy Council; its decision is full and final.

Let me come to the case of MedPoint. The ruling of the Supreme Court was challenged and set aside, thanks God, by the ultimate Court of Appeal. Now, I am not nasty and I do not intend to condescend to the level of some of our friends sitting on Government bench. I am not going to read the verdict or the ruling given by Judges of the Supreme Court, and I am not even going to say what was said within four walls, what was the ruling of the Supreme Court, and what request was made. I do not intend to elaborate, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know the whole saga, and I know under what circumstances and the pressure that was borne

for the acquisition of the MedPoint, Mr Speaker, Sir. But it is good to recall, and what is good for the Prime Minister is equally good for any citizen of this country, the right to fight a case and access to legal means should be a right and not a privilege. Sometimes, seeking redress to the Privy Council can indeed be very costly. So, that is why I say separation of power is paramount, and Government has no moral or legal right to have a hold upon any institution. Let the institution function and thank God for the Privy Council. And it is good to recall when the constitutional amendment was voted on 10 December 1991 to change the status of Mauritius into a Republic. I think yesterday or the day before, I raised the matter with hon. Collendavelloo to find out exactly what were the feelings then amongst his peers and friends when the Bill was moved. And as I say, except for a few dissenting voices, the whole country was united not to abolish the Privy Council. And I feel sorry to listen to some of the points canvassed by the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage, hon. Teeluck. I know that, somehow, we need to convey our political feelings, but one thing I will tell our friend: disclose the truth, state facts; do not just blurt out anything because somebody has conveyed an information for the wrong reason or simply to gain some political mileage. It leads to nowhere.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have travelled a long way, but there is no room or there is no call to be at each other's throat because we know what is the cost of the outcome of political vendetta, and it has a high cost. And who is called upon to bear the cost? It is not us; it is the taxpayers who are called upon to bear the cost. And it is a financial crime, except that those who are culprits get away because the State is called upon to pay, but they have to face the electorate. And the electorate will so decide, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We are talking of an additional burden of Rs45,000 to be borne by every taxpayer, Mr Speaker, Sir. What message are we going to convey, or what are we going to explain to the father, mother or young couple who are struggling to make ends meet? A daughter was saying yesterday: today, our kids or our grandchildren are used to good things. We certainly have taken the rung of the social ladder to be where we are. In fact, we have to widen the circle to make it true for all of us. But then, what are we going to tell those parents who are struggling to make ends meet? What they have done is to impose an unnecessary levy upon the poor, upon the desperate, upon the destitute, upon those who work hard day and night to earn a decent living. There is a price to pay for that, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is a price to pay and the price to pay, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to make a U-turn; is to say, I can do better things; is to say, there would not be exploitation of taxpayers. It is not because you have the number

that there should be tyranny of numbers. Because when you translate the votes obtained at the General Election, Mr Speaker Sir, officially again, what is the difference? But you are so good at being deceptive that you think all is allowed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, people are fuming with rage and the petroleum levy certainly has not been a good thing because I ask myself whether there was a need to come with an additional levy of Rs2, notwithstanding the fact that Rs4.40 had already been levied on Mogas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I say, people are fuming with rage because they want to know whether there is a cause to honour the obligation, but they have no choice, they will do it. But then, you have to tell them what are the reasons that this levy is being imposed, knowing that many vaccines had been donated by India and other friendly countries as part of vaccine diplomacy. And since I am talking of donation, as of now we do not know where the donation made by Jack Ma, the Chinese philanthropist, is. Ignorance, Mr Speaker, Sir, in relation to donation is not bliss. The people have a right to know. And the Minister will have to tell us whether this levy will be a permanent feature, of course, with a hike in prices, if the Petroleum Price Committee so decides.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, all is well if we have a culture of restraint and transparency, if the country is able to generate wealth, if we are able to create growth with frictional unemployment, and if we get our fundamental rights. Hon. Bodha was right to say that we have reached the end of a cycle, but it is the legacy that is going to bequeath that is important. We cannot make an exit and then create a situation or an environment which is hostile. We cannot be reckless. We have to assume our responsibility. But, at the same time, we have to say that there are opportunities which are knocking and we have to adapt, reinvent, re-engineer, and if there is a call to be made to go for constructive disruption, so should we, and we should do it.

Let me refer to a statement made by a young Economist, Mr Kevin Teeroovengadum, who called for less brick and mortar and more of a digital economy. Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Machine Learning and Automation, as we say, adapt or perish, whether it is blue or green economy, our human capital is our treasure trove, our best asset!

Mr Speaker, Sir, then, we need to look at the level of preparedness, and our level of preparedness is our capital. And we have to be prepared and constantly raise the level of preparedness because, as I say, the challenges can be daunting. And we have dreams, Mr Speaker, Sir. We all want to improve the quality of our lives. We want our country to be

better placed, but to cherish our dream, there is only one factor that remains constant. We call it meaningful change. And for a meaningful change, we need to get our fundamental rights; otherwise, the rest becomes platitude. And it is precisely because we want meaningful change that the truth has to prevail in relation of not only the economic status and fiscal status, but truth has to prevail in relation to sound management.

Mr Speaker, Sir, budgets come and budgets go, but never has it been so difficult to separate facts from fiction and to distinguish between reality and illusion in the Government's account. Fiscal reporting, Mr Speaker, Sir, is governed by internationally accepted fiscal transparency principles such as the IMF Fiscal Transparency Code. Statistics Mauritius compiles statistical data based on the concept and definition laid down in the IMF manual Government of Finance Statistics. This is the message and yet, we subscribe allegedly to Bretton Woods Institutions. But, unfortunately, what does the Budget do? This Budget only confirms the considerable extent to which the principles of fiscal credibility, of integrity and accountability are being flouted, Mr Speaker, Sir. It fails to provide a credible and reliable picture of Government's financial position and performance. And I will focus on three areas of deceptive fiscal practices. The list of three broad categories: Absence of consolidation in the fiscal account of all central Government entities, namely the special extra budgetary funds and off-budget Special Purpose Vehicles like the Metro Express. As a result by displacing expenditures outside the Budget, the budget deficit is underestimated by about 4% points of GDP, and loan from Exim Bank of India can be channelled into extra budgetary fund to finance the cost of Metro Express or for that matter a PPP project, bypassing Consolidated Funds. So, where is transparency? Where is accountability? And I can understand when the Director of Audit calls for papers and information, calls for persons to give information. He, unfortunately, is barred from doing his work, Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the fact that he is holder of a constitutional post. But beyond the Director of Audit, there is World Bank, there is IMF, there are Moody's credit ratings, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me refer to a World Bank Report on Mauritius, and the recent Report criticised the channelling of expenditures for Special Funds and other Budget vehicles which undermine the effectiveness of the budgetary process to manage and control spending.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my second point. Fiscal reports are not published in a regular and timely manner and information on Special Funds is not available for several past years, let alone for the current year. It is apparent that expenditure on Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme in the Financial Year 2020-2021 was in excess of the

figure of Rs8 billion of subsidies mentioned in the Budget, and this must have been made from the National Resilience Fund, but, again, this information is not available.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a huge Budget transfer of Rs15.7 billion was made in 2020-2021 to Special Funds, presumably to meet wage subsidy cost. The details of expenses in Special Funds, as between recurrent and capital expenses, are no longer available. Key information on capital projects, as indicated in tables H3 and H4 of the Appendix 2020-2021 Budget, is no longer available in the 2021-2022 Budget.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I come to the third point. The fiscal statistics are not compiled in accordance with internationally accepted standards such as the IMF mythology on Government finance statistics. Examples include the erroneous recording of Rs60 billion of transfers from the Central Bank as budget revenue in 2020-2021 or other incorrect treatment of reserves of the CEB, STC, Mauritius Ports Authority, Financial Services Commission as budget revenue instead of as financing. As a result, the budget deficit is underestimated by more than 3% of GDP for 2021-2022 and by more than 1% of GDP for 2020-2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Bérenger put a supplementary question to the PNQ addressed to the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection as to whether payment of compensation to Betamax will impact on the transfer of profit of STC as Budget revenue. And earlier, hon. Ameer Meea mentioned that Pension Funds of several State enterprises need to be replenished because the funds are running low. It is unacceptable that parastatal bodies should transfer some of the profit as revenue to Government. First and foremost, they need to secure investment for those who are working in those bodies, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to Equity Investment. The integrity of Government's finance in statistics is also eroded by the arbitrary classification of expenses as equity. In 2020-2021, an equity investment of Rs11.9 billion was made in the National Property Fund to cover payments to BAI policyholders, National Insurance Company and for other costs of dismantling the BAI Group.

Mr Speaker, Sir, again, a heavy price to pay for vengeance. A heavy price to pay for the expropriation and nationalisation of BAI, and it is all the doing of this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, and they have to be answerable to the people out there. As I say, as a consequence of an indecent political decision from this revengeful regime, taxpayers are bearing an additional burden, Mr Speaker, Sir. And we know that the regime deliberately pulled the plug from the socket of Bramer Bank to bring the collapse of BAI. The Rs11.9

billion should, in fact, be recorded as an expense and not as equity investment, thereby widening the consolidated budget deficit by a further 2.7 of GDP.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many policyholders are still waiting to recover their investment. It was an electoral promise and it is yet to be honoured, Mr Speaker, Sir. When we talk of equity injections, I am not surprised that this Government is up to almost anything and everything. Equity injections in financially moribund bodies like Wastewater Management Authority, which represent disguised subsidies to cover operating deficit, Mr Speaker, Sir.

But then, I am not going to blame the Minister totally. There is a fine gentleman at the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. We call him the Houdini of the Ministry because he can deliver to the satisfaction of the Minister, of the Prime Minister, but since they are the ones who make the request, it is to the detriment of the nation. I say hats off to the Master Chef because he can concoct, he can cook, he can deliver, and he is a great man. He has served many Ministers; Mr Manraj.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we talk of manipulation and fudging of fiscal statistics, the failure to include in public data advances of Rs28 billion by the Bank of Mauritius to Government is a blatant example of manipulation. The Minister attempted to justify the transfer of Rs60 billion from the Bank of Mauritius as an exceptional measure to save jobs and support health and income. Fair enough. But what he fails to understand is that whatever the fiscal policy, Government should not fudge fiscal statistics, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Any responsible Minister of Finance would openly and transparently disclose to the nation the gravity of the fiscal and economic situation instead of announcing a balanced Budget in year 2020-2021. And now, he is compounding his irresponsibility by still claiming that the Bank of Mauritius transfer of Rs60 billion is Government revenue and by completely ignoring BOM advances of Rs28 billion to Government in computing public debt.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us say without fear or prejudice, a debt is a debt. Bank of Mauritius is an independent body and it has to protect its independence. There cannot be erosion of the Bank of Mauritius. At least, follow the example of South Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir!

And what happened? Bank of Mauritius initially acted properly and it declared in Public Notice on 04 June 2021 that the balance of the Rs28 billion will be reckoned as advance against future profits of the Bank distributable to Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to dwell on this issue of the Bank of Mauritius transfer to Government at some length. While one concedes that the exceptional COVID-19 circumstances may require some amount of some exceptional and free deficit financing by the Bank of Mauritius, call it helicopter money, it is clear that the Bank of Mauritius transfer of Rs60 billion is considered as excessive and unpalatable because the adverse consequences on the rupee, on inflation and on the ability of the Central Bank to pursue an independent monetary policy to stabilise the rupee and the prices.

As I mentioned earlier, Moody's, IMF and the World Bank have all heavily criticised this overly accommodative monetary stands of the Bank of Mauritius. Moody's has even downgraded Mauritius and is threatening to do so if public debt deteriorates further. All these institutions have highlighted that the risks of such an excessively aggressive monetary policy would have on the stability of the financial sector and on investor confidence, leading to a potential capital outflows, a collapse of the rupee and a financial crisis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated earlier, there are lessons to be learnt from the South African experience, when Moody's credit ratings agency declared South Africa Government bond junk and consequently was stripped of its investment grade rating. There was capital flight which landed in ABSA in Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been told that Government issued bonds are not having the required buyers and investors, and individual buyers are concerned. If I were the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, I would be worried because these are wrong signals being sent by prospective buyers, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not because a high percentage of our debt is domestic loan that all is well. Hon. Ramful made the point very clear earlier. We need to err on the principle of caution; otherwise, the consequences can be far-reaching.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bank of Mauritius appears to have given heed to this serious concern and warnings, but the Bank of Mauritius announced in May 2020 that it would be raising fund for Government transfer from financial market through open market operation. And I say it again: it would be raising funds for Government transfer from financial market through open market operation. But what happened? Why did it change course radically a year later and has, in May, funded about half of the grants, Rs32 billion from its Special Reserve? The Bank of Mauritius also converted the balance of Rs28 billion into advances repayable over the very long-term from the Bank of Mauritius distributable income to Government. No interest, of course, to be paid and refund will be made over a long time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government also showed signs of policy changes to accommodate domestic and international concerns and promised a few months ago to tackle the fiscal deficit by reducing expenditure as much as 25%. The Financial Secretary was to chair the Cost Cutting Committee, but, as of now, the Minister has said nothing but is sticking to its guns on the treatment of Bank of Mauritius revenue. Government should not have shown the Rs60 billion from the Bank of Mauritius as revenue for Financial Year 2020/2021. Government should have added the Rs28 billion of Bank of Mauritius advances to public debt. Mr Speaker, Sir, instead, the Minister is hiding behind the pretext that there is no official loan agreement with the Bank of Mauritius for Rs28 billion. This argument does not stand. The Bank of Mauritius has, in fact, declared that Government will no longer receive any distributable income from the Bank of Mauritius annually until an amount of Rs28 billion is repaid. Even if there is no loan agreement and the Minister prefers to ignore the Rs28 billion of the Bank of Mauritius advances, the hard fact is that Government is clearly foregoing future revenue from the Bank of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, how on earth can the Minister claim that it is not indebted vis-à-vis the Bank of Mauritius, which is going to lose future Bank of Mauritius revenue equivalent to Rs28 billion? Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is taking an advance of Rs28 billion on the future revenue from the Bank of Mauritius. The Minister seems to stick to his misguided policy of using central money for its budgetary needs and is playing deceptive tricks to underestimate the size of public debt. And I refer to the commitment given to the IMF; the Minister refused to confirm though, from what I have been told, commitment was given to confirm the IMF statement dated 07 May 2021 that the Bank of Mauritius Act will be amended to prevent any exceptional transfers to Government. This is putting the country at serious risk of further Moody's downgrade, with more adverse comments from the IMF and the World Bank, with disastrous consequences for our economic and financial stability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Bank finds that the Bank of Mauritius transfer to Government of Rs60 billion stands out for its non-refundable nature in size; a 13.6% of GDP. The Reserve Bank of India, unfortunately, is the only example that the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development could summon from all Central Banks in the world in support of this unconventional policy. This is a poor comparison. First, the magnitude of the Central Bank transfers is not comparable. For India, it represents less than 1% of its GDP. The Central Bank transfer in India was based on sound economic capital framework, on specific criteria to determine the level of surplus of the Central Bank reserves. It was

determined by an independent Committee, chaired by the former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. More importantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, India can pursue a more expansionary monetary policy because it still has exchange control and can insulate its rupee from depreciation pressure. But for a small and highly open economy like Mauritius, with free capital flows, expansionary monetary policy will impart a direct and sizeable pressure on the rupee to cause higher inflation. Developed countries too can pursue more accommodative monetary policies like quantitative easing because they have reserve currencies and are not concerned about the weakening of the rupee.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government should adjust its public debt data to include the Rs28 billion of Bank of Mauritius advances and stop deduction for fake consolidation adjustment. Government should give clear signals that it does not intend to use the Central Bank as a printing machine to meet its expenditure in order to avoid eroding investor confidence, undermining the independence of the Central Bank, damaging our financial stability and harming the country's standing and reputation in the financial market.

In respect of budget deficit and debt deficit, Mr Speaker, Sir, the facts are the budget deficit - as they stand, adjusted for all the fiscal malpractices - stands at 20% of GDP compared to the official figure, 5.6% of GDP. Instead of the official budget deficit of 2021-2022, of Rs24 billion or 5% of the GDP, the real fiscal deficit is Rs65 billion, well over 10% of our GDP. Mr Speaker, Sir, these are appalling discrepancies that are expressly designed to conceal the gravity of the true fiscal situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, gross public sector debt - earlier hon. Ramful mentioned it - has exceeded 100% of GDP as at end of June 2021. Dropping a devious consolidation, adjustment and accounting for Betamax payments will probably add another 3% point to the debt ratio. I am sure the Minister does realise the significance of this critical threshold that we should never possibly have imagined reaching. Government now owes more than the national income for the year 2021.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I stated earlier that we are in deep morass and Government is behaving like the violinist on the Titanic. They are playing nice tunes; recovery is robust; the corner with 9% real growth in the coming financial year, Mr Speaker, Sir, it's like joining Alice in Wonderland! Unfortunately, the Minister's strategic focus on boosting consumption is narrowing the room for capital investment, widening external deficit, reducing potential for future growth while raising our debt burden.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come quickly to public investment before I conclude. The data published by Statistics Mauritius indicate that public investment stagnated at Rs19 billion for the three years, 2015, 2016, 2017, before rising in 2018 and 2019, mainly on account of the implementation of the Metro Express, a project conceived by the Labour Party, and then falling back to Rs19 billion in 2020. Public investment in real terms arose marginally in 2015, then, declined in 2016 and 2017, and again in 2020.

In terms of GDP, public investment falls continuously from 4.8% to a record low of 4.1% in 2017, rising only to 4.5% in 2020 compared to public investment rate of well over 5% and even reaching 5.5% in 2011 and 2012 during the previous Labour Government.

It is no wonder that Government focus on consumption growth, as broadcast by the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development over the years did not help GDP growth. In fact, GDP growth fell to a low 3 % in real terms. Public investment in 2020 has taken a blow or the part impacted by COVID. It is with some relief that we are witnessing a reversal in economic policy emphasis from conception to investment. The Minister is now promising a massive investment programme for the coming years that he hopes will revive economic growth. Unfortunately, his record on realising public investment targets is truly dismal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, public sector investment is only Rs24 billion in 2020-2021 compared to the initial estimate of Rs40 billion. In 2019-2020, public sector investment was revised to Rs25 billion, compared to an original estimate of Rs50 billion. In 2018-2019, the revised figure was Rs25 billion instead of the target of Rs52 billion, and in 2017-2018, the revised figure was Rs26 billion compared to an objective of Rs42 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the average implementation rate on public sector investment, according to Government's own figure, is slightly over half or 55%. Government is now aiming at a public sector investment of about Rs50 billion in 2021-2022, which is broadly similar to previous years, and is about the same as was targeted in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. So, where is the great investment leap that the Minister is talking about? Moreover, he is likely to achieve in 2021-2022 the same almost constant level of public sector investment as previous years, that is, probably about Rs25 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it stands to reason that this Government is misleading the population. There will be no major increase in public sector investment for Financial Year 2021-2022, nor for ensuing fiscal years. Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe all that he means to say is that there will

be an exceptional increase in 2021-2022 only in Land Drainage Project. I understand he is banking heavily on the Land Drainage Project to pull the country out of the drain.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if the country continues with the same annual level of public sector investment at Rs25 billion, there is every reason to believe that the GDP growth will continue to stagnate at 3% annually or even decline. The forecast GDP growth of 9% for 2021-2022 is built on an over-optimistic forecast, not only of investment but public and private, and also of consumption. The purchasing power of consumers is deeply battered by rising prices and consumption is unlikely to rebound strongly as long as COVID uncertainties persist.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the other remaining component of GDP per growth is export. But, again, the opportunities for robust resumption of growth are limited as long as the world economy remains in a lingering grip of the COVID pandemic.

Export of tourism services, which is so critical for reviving growth, are not expected to recover fully until 2023. The average of 72,000 tourists per month, this is more a myth than reality. When we had about 1.1 million tourists in normal years, the average was 83,000. This means that we are expecting such a huge pick up in tourists' arrival that will bring us 85% of our previous figure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect to budget deficit, once again, if we cannot control our expenditure and we fall short in our revenue target, the much publicised budget deficit alleged officially 6% will shoot up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, export of goods may perform better but would still not generate the over-optimism growth the Minister is hoping for. With lower GDP growth than expected in the near term, Government revenue will also be lower and the fiscal deficit even wider, leading further increase in public debt to finance deficit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if I have gone through those facts and figures, not only because I have done my homework and met people who are knowledgeable, but people who speak the truth, and I impress upon the Minister to disclose facts and figures as they are, not to adopt what we call a kleptocratic state of mind. There is no room for kleptocratic regime because people are losing faith in the country's prospect. And let me tell the hon. Minister, he talks of 3 R's, but the policies can be summed up into 3 D's: Disillusionment, Demoralisation and Despair. Today, Mauritius is in deep trouble and this Government is responsible for the economic morass, but you don't have to harass the people, and the people will assume the responsibilities, and we will live up to the expectation of those who can deliver.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is time for them to leave and let a new team save the country from economic crisis, ruin and desolation.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 9.18 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 10.33 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Be seated, please!

ANNOUNCEMENT

HON. NUCKCHEDDY'S DRIVER, POLICE OFFICER A. K. S. – QUARANTINE CENTRE - ADMISSION

Mr Speaker: I have an announcement.

Hon. Members, earlier today in the course of the proceedings, the matter as to whether the hon. Deputy Chairman of Committees (Mr Nuckcheddy), was entitled to be present in the Chamber, following the mention made by the hon. Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West (Mr Armance) to the effect that the driver of hon. Nuckcheddy, has been quarantined, was raised.

Hon. Members, I have to inform the House that the matter has been queried and I am in presence of a correspondence from the Ministry of Health and Wellness to the effect that –

Mr A. K. S, (Police Officer attached to Mr Nuckcheddy) was placed in the Ambre Quarantine Centre on 28 May 2021 following a direct contact with a COVID-19 patient.

His PCR tests for SARS-CoV2 done on 29 May, 04 June and 11 June were all negative. He was discharged from Ambre Quarantine Centre on 11 June and was placed on a further seven days self-isolation. On 18 June, he did his Day-21-PCR Test at Belvedère Mediclinic and it was negative.

Furthermore, the Acting Regional Public Health Superintendent, Communicable Disease Control Unit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, informed that, following a conversation with Mr A. K. S., the latter reported to have had his last physical contact with hon. Nuckcheddy on 26 May and that he proposes to report to work on Monday 21 June.

In the circumstances, the presence of hon. Nuckcheddy in the Chamber is not considered to be a matter of concern.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

(10.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr A. Ganoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Although it is a bit late, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to end my speech within a reasonable time; within the time allotted to me.

I will deal firstly with one issue which has been raised by the Opposition persistently in the course of the debates. Several Members of the Opposition have commented upon that issue. It is related to the issue of Betamax. I will not come back on the issue of Betamax, we know the whole story, the whole Saga. It would seem that the legal battle is over although the political one will be still on for some time, but that is not the point I wish to make today.

The point I wish to make today is that several times during the debates, Members of the Opposition have raised the point that the levy of Rs2 which the Minister of Finance proposed, which will allow us to buy the vaccines in view of the raging pandemic, was not agreed by the Members of the Opposition. They made several comments. Some said that we have already procured all the vaccines that we needed, which is certainly not true. Others have said that, there was no need to tax, to impose that levy on the people of this country. The last orator, he said that the people are fuming with rage because of these Rs2 of levy. And this argument has been mixed with the fact that the Government will have now to pay about Rs5 billion to Betamax Ltd. And one Member even said that this levy in fact has been deliberately imposed, in fact, to help Government to pay that sum of the Rs5 billion for Betamax Ltd.

So, the Rs2 of levy have been mixed with the Betamax issue. And I just want to remind the House and the country at large, Mr Speaker, Sir, that during the Labour days, in fact, we all remember the famous hedging losses. And I have with me a few PQs and PNQs which were, at that time, raised by Members of the Opposition – of the MMM Opposition – even the then Leader of the Opposition, hon. Paul Bérenger, asked questions about this issue. And we remember, in fact, there were 2 hedging losses concerning the STC and Air Mauritius.

Now at the sitting of 13 December 2011, there was a PNQ by hon. Paul Bérenger, asking the then Ministry of Industry about the financial situation of the STC, about the freight rates paid to Betamax Ltd, the amount of money paid on fuel hedging losses and the outstanding amount remaining to be paid and this is the answer which the then Minister gave, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to part (c) of the question, that is part (c) was the amount of money paid today on fuel hedging losses and the outstanding amount remaining to be paid. This is what the Minister said –

“Mr Speaker Sir, total fuel hedging losses as at July 2009 stood at Rs4.7 billion. The total payment effected to date amounts to Rs3.8 billion and the outstanding amount remaining to be recovered is Rs900 m. It is expected that the total amount will be recovered by November 2013.”

And he goes on to say –

“The total amount would have already been fully recovered by April 2012 when Rs3 per litre was being collected from both mogas and gas oil prices. However, in March this year, the rate was reduced to Rs1.25 for mogas per litre and Rs1 for gas oil to contain inflationary pressures.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, now, we cannot compare the Betamax case to the hedging losses made on the petroleum products, or even for Air Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the case of Betamax, there is an arguable case, that is why Government decided to put an end to the contract, the case went before Court, before arbitration, before the Privy Council but in the case of the hedging losses we are talking, whether for Air Mauritius or even for the STC, Mr Speaker, Sir, we know in what circumstances, at no point in time an inquiry was made. In fact, in the PQ, I can read it to you; the STC Board was never informed about the hedging measures, neither the Ministry of Commerce was informed at that time. This is all on record in Hansard and anybody can check it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2013, when hon. Bérenger was not in the country for health reasons, we all remember, I was leader of the Opposition, and the first PNQ I put to the then Government was precisely about Betamax, the hedging losses. And the third part of my question was the amount of hedging losses, including the amount of interest paid on the insurance cover. That was in 2013, as I just said, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that was the answer given by the hon. Minister –

“With regard to part (b) (iv) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that this matter has been raised on several occasions in the National Assembly and this information has already been given to the House. I am informed by the STC that hedging losses amounted to Rs4,739 billion in July 2009.”

So, confirming again that the population had to pay for these hedging losses, at that time and I have another question, Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the hedging losses of Air Mauritius. This time, the question was asked to then hon. Prime Minister and, in fact, he never gave the answer. If I could find the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, just to illustrate. Today, a lot is being said about openness, transparency, open Government and so on but at that time, the Prime Minister refused to answer any question concerning hedging losses with regard to Air Mauritius. So, at that time Rs3 per litre, then the population was not being *saigné à blanc*, the population was not being fleeced, Mr Speaker, Sir. I just wanted to remind my hon. friends from the Opposition about these hedging transactions which took place and which led to losses of Rs4.37 billion which the population was made to pay at that time, so much for the amnesia of certain Members of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as this Budget is concerned, I have listened to the criticisms of the Opposition as much as I have been able to, Mr Speaker, Sir, and whenever I was not present in the House, it was because I had to be at the Ministry or to be at one or two virtual conferences which, unfortunately, are the procedure that is being adopted now in view of the pandemic and I find it very sad what has happened during those debates, Mr Speaker, Sir. The example is the last orator which took the floor before me.

Hon. Dr. Boolell, as usual, started making an appeal to the Government and so on and reminded us how he has, on several occasions, tried to play the game and contacted the Prime Minister and so on with a view to find consensus on certain issues. But then, at the end of his speech, we heard him, how virulent, vitriolic he was, Mr Speaker, Sir. To me, most of these criticisms that have been made against Government are unfounded, unjustified and when I have listened to the Opposition’s criticism, I was reminded of one President of the US who had led the US to war to make the world at that time safe for democracy. It is a bit as we are doing today against the most dangerous enemy of humanity, the COVID-19 pandemic. And I would like to tell the country at large and to the Members of the Opposition that we, Members of Government, are not here merely to chant the glory of our colleague, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development. He, of course, deserves our support and felicitations.

Mr Speaker Sir, we are here, on this side of the House, to ensure that our countrymen live more amply, will find a spirit of hope and achievement as well as a higher sense of confidence and in greater safety. We are here together to create the conditions to make every Mauritian live a better life. We are here to protect our citizens against any odds, whether it is health hazards, job uncertainty, security in their homes or safety on our routes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to understand what this Budget has sought to do, allow me to situate it in the proper context. It is one thing to criticise and gain political mileage in public opinion, but quite a different thing to wriggle out of the global constraint when a tidal wave, as exemplified by the impact of COVID-19, has engulfed the whole planet.

The COVID-19 crisis which started in China, the second world economic power, Mr Speaker, Sir, cannot be compared, in fact, to the crisis of 2008 which started in the US. Of course, both had a contagion effect but the 2008 crisis was concentrated in the US and parts of Europe and had minimal impact on Mauritius because we were a relatively well-diversified economy even at the time. It did not affect mobility, we showed resilience. In contrast, this present eruption has a contagion effect that spreads across the world marked by fear and has stifled mobility both internally and externally.

As a result, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we know, frontiers have been closed, the economy was disrupted, social life was turned upside down, the tourism industry as well as the aviation industry came to a halt affecting 22% of the labour force and denying the country of Rs50 billion in foreign exchange, excluding the income and employment multiplier effects. COVID-19, Mr Speaker, Sir, has disrupted our social and economic order at a lightning speed and on a scale that we have not seen in living memory. This lockdown, necessitated to combat the pandemic, affected billions of people across the world, going to school, going to work, being with family and friends is still a huge risk and in answer to our friends of the Opposition benches, we must ask them: how did Mauritius do compared to other countries? This is the question that we have to ask, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This week, the world had about 178 million cases with a death casualty of about 3.9 million in descending rank in terms of most affected countries. Mauritius ranks 191 out of 222 countries by any standard, a revealing performance for a country with such a narrow resource base. With 1,700 cases and 19 deaths, we precede a lot of countries, Mr Speaker, Sir and we would have performed better than a lot of countries, Seychelles, St Lucia, Malta, Jamaica, Singapore, Maldives, Cyprus, Ireland almost all the islands across the world with a

significant tourist industry and how did we do this Mr Speaker, Sir? It did not just happen accidentally but was caused to happen by sheer vision, cautious policies, a sound trade-off between the health and death risk of a nation against the transitory in conclude.

Moreover, even if we had left our frontiers open with all the risks involved, there was no guarantee of the frontiers would have been opened to traffic with us. This is exactly what the hon. Prime Minister and the Government did with a vision, an unprecedently firmness and policies that shielded the nation against a COVID-19 pandemic and against the darkness of death. When we look at death per million populations, Mauritius has a score of 14, only 20 countries did better including China and a dozen African countries almost closed their economies, large in area, such as the Sahara and scarcely populated. Total tests account for about 28% of the population, one of the highest ratios across the world and it is still progressing, Mr Speaker, Sir.

While I will restrain myself in all modesty to say that we have been hundred percent perfect, but it is important that the nation, including Members of the Opposition, appreciate the efforts of Government and the result and effectiveness of our policies that we put in place. We can always be wise after the event but the real courage and boldness with which the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and other advisors addressed this issue, is one of the best whether we compare ourselves by international best practice or within our country against any of the crises we have faced throughout our short history. Therefore, let us be grateful for that at least, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Government, as announced, plans to spend Rs1.3 billion at the outbreak of COVID-19, it went further, it provided fiscal support, introduced wage assistance to keep the tourist industry and related economic activities running, and other import income support schemes. In a nutshell, Mr Speaker, Sir, the authorities implemented a wide array of containment measures since the outbreak and the Government elaborated on the most comprehensive support mechanism to protect our people, employment and to support companies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me just say a few words on the economic situation on the macroeconomic fundamentals. The Budget has been criticised by Members of the Opposition for not covering all the economic variables. Members will recall that with the many reports by the IMF and the World Bank and the ensuing Press reports, as well as the discussions that took place on several platforms; the budget focuses more on positive measures, how to address the negative impact of COVID-19 and how to set the economy back on sustainable growth trajectory. The hon. Minister has, in fact, made a judicious artistic blend of social

measures to allow the nation to breathe, to live and to make the best of their lives and to create the enabling environment. Government has preferred to be cautious and neither have we jeopardised the growth path nor the living standard of our people. The nation has had to make sacrifices as it often happens in the history of countless nations in the wake of economic crises. The more so, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, that COVID-19 is a pandemic, the pandemic is a contagion with disastrous economic and health consequences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, employment remains the most visible socio-economic variable. Official figures, as we all know, as was announced by the hon. Minister, point to 9.2% of the labour force as computed by Statistics Mauritius based on the UN system of computation. Some critics argue we can lie with statistics; others are criticising that figures are concealed and this has been a common criticism whatever Government is in place. However, I will underline that Statistics Mauritius is an independent organisation and produces statistics based on its surveys and information supplied by respondents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main issue is, how do we address the problem because employment creates growth and no rational Government should allow resources to stay idle. The Budget has addressed the problems at two levels: the short-term and the long-term. We are fully conscious, Mr Speaker, Sir, that unemployment, in fact, indeed impoverishes people, creates undesirable social behaviour and is a clog, while a job anchors someone in life, bestows dignity to him and fortifies law and order. This Government is embarking on projects of infrastructure to grassroots expectations, reforms in agriculture to meet growing demands of the population as illustrated by the rising prices of vegetables, strengthening of the SMEs through grants, concessionary loans, marketing support and training and reskilling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we know how jobs are created. The Opposition keeps criticising our policy of investing in infrastructure projects, they argue that Government is throwing millions in the drains. Similarly, they believe constructing high-rise building is squandering public money. There is nothing further from the truth and this policy can be justified, Mr Speaker, Sir, both theoretically, under the Keynes' macroeconomics and empirically like the reconstruction of Germany and Japan evidenced during the post war expansionary reconstruction efforts. Investing billions of Rupees as a ripple effect, we all know it creates jobs for construction entrepreneur, work for manual workers, openings for supplies and materials and when these people earn income they spend and there are several rounds of expenditure. In economics they call this the multiplier effect; we have income multipliers,

output multipliers and employment multipliers. Similarly, projects like the erection of high-rise buildings, housing, social housing will absorb a huge fraction of the idle labour force.

The hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development explained that he expects the projects proposed in the Budget together with the response of the private sector will create jobs of such magnitude that the rate of unemployment will be back to around 7%, which is still high but the process would have started Mr Speaker, Sir, because Rome was never built in a day. But these projects do not have only job and income benefits, they have a social dimension too, as they expand development in the broader sense of the term and they raise the quality of life and participation of a whole nation from one level to another as global thinkers and renowned world economics have shown –

- (1) these drains, pavements, these mini bridges, these small lanes, and these other projects falling within the community development programme and the Economic Recovery Programme mentioned in the Budget, will improve the quality of life of the common citizen, the cleanliness of this country, especially pertinent for health purposes and the tourism industry;
- (2) it enhances safety, protects children and senior citizens from any unnecessary accidents;
- (3) it is the oil that lubricates small and micro businesses by facilitating exchanges, allows a taxi to fetch a sick person or the disembarking of materials at his or her doorstep, and
- (4) it will help Mauritius to obtain points on the scoreboard of the human development index which sent the right signal to investors and consolidates the image of this country as a thriving nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we must neither wear blinkers nor be myopic nor oppose just for the sake of opposing. Government does not produce nor commercialised the ordinary goods that consumers want. We leave this to the private sector. However, a Government with a vision creates the enabling environment for business to flourish; grassroots infrastructure is one of them.

Now, Mr Speaker Sir, we are constructing thousands of social housing units and coming up with new schemes to boost up the housing sector. What is the use of enabling a citizen of whatever social strata he belongs to, to own a house when a single flash of flood ruins all his furniture, all his household appliances, television in one or two days, items he has purchased after decades of efforts and savings. The damages are not material but they are

also moral and stressful. A caring Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, sees beyond the tip of his nose.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to investment and savings or reports, economists and previous planned documents point to the fact that to generate a 6% growth, we need an investment to GDP ratio exceeding 25%, coupled with a proper study of the capital output ratio to identify sectors able to generate higher revenues for a given level of capital. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are confronted here with one major policy problem that was unfortunately initiated years ago under a previous Government, under a previous Minister of Finance, and we are paying the consequences up to now. We know that there is no reason why investments should not equal savings. During the period of 2005 and 2010, Mr Speaker, Sir, savings fell to slightly above 10% because the policy then was to tax the interest on savings to eliminate the exemptions given to insurance policies, etc. Over time, this myopic policy has led to some form of stickiness to savings such that we are faced with a saving rate that barely exceeds 7%. This Government needs to address such issues properly and correct the wrong policies introduced in the past.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the eye of the storm, fortunately our financial services sector has given positive results, and we are able to capture some inflows through our financial account. Mr Speaker, Sir, Government could have invested more according to me in this budget. Despite what the Opposition is saying, the credibility of Government is still strong, and perhaps they do not know, but institutions like the African Bank of Development and other institutions are still willing to offer Mauritius euro loans to 400 million euros at zero interest. Would an institution dealing with so many countries, including European countries, Mr Speaker, Sir, international institutions, gamble on a loan if the country does not have the affordability? While Government keeps such an offer as a buffer, it envisions a policy of prudential economic management and opts for an optimum level of investment, taking into account its absorption capacity and the fear of crowding out effect. Government in its wisdom does not wish to crowd out the private sector, and so, deliberately limits its investment. The private sector, we are expecting, will hopefully respond to Government capacity to invest by ratio of around 5:1. Why, Mr Speaker, Sir, are such institutions willing to support our country? Part of the reasons stems from the fact that Mauritius has international reserves of over 18.1 months of import equivalent. I think hon. Minister Seeruttun said that earlier on; although about 5 to 4 months are from private banks' deposit

with the Central Bank and the nation should know that, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the solvency of Mauritius is clear.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on inflation, yes, it is an important indicator. It hits the purse of the common man. It is a tax on the poor people. We know that, Mr Speaker, Sir, we know about the price of vegetables; we know about the price of some important consumer goods have gone up. I believe we have addressed the problem of vegetable prices through a new agricultural policy with an arsenal of incentives to small growers and to the SMEs, and various facilities to spur agricultural production.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as hon. Minister Seeruttun has also said, we have no control over freight or goods produced in other countries. Mauritian entrepreneurs should seize this opportunity for substitute imports if it is profitable, but we agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we should be very wary that inflation does not get out of control.

Regarding debt, Mr Speaker, Sir, again in normal circumstances, debt at the level we have reached would have been an issue, is an issue, but the IMF and the World Bank have underlined it, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we are conscious to bring it down. The Minister has announced that he is stepping efforts to reduce debts and bring it at lower sustainable level. Members of the Opposition should be aware that half of the world, if not more, is in a similar situation. Mauritius is paying heed to the advice of the IMF and the World Bank. At the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the risk of repetition it is vital to recognise that our problem stems also because of our lack of diversification and overdependence on a few sectors. As a nation, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to converge our efforts to launch new sectors rather than involving in a blame game.

Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed a negative growth of 14.9% is a big blow to any economy and such a high dependence on a single sector like tourism has been a lopsided approach to development shared by all of us. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past we have succeeded in worse situation. We can do it again. In 1982, 1983, 1991, even in 2010, all these Governments which comprise Members of different shades of political colour, but with good will and determination, they overcame it when we had less resources. Today we have better bargaining power, Mr Speaker, Sir, than we had in 1983; we have a stronger base. So, let us be responsible, turn our sleeves and set to work to bring this variable that was inflated during an exceptional circumstance.

In the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister of Finance announced several reforms which are expected to enhance our competitiveness improve our resilience, correct weaknesses of our sectorial activities and ultimately improve our fiscal deficit as we have done in the past. Mr Speaker, Sir, we can expect that this will lead to a fairly high growth. The Minister of Finance has forecasted growth of 9% based on 2020. This is more or less consistent with the trended growth of the past decade if we abstract from 2020 which is statistically an outlier. So, we can be back to normal, Mr Speaker, Sir. However, to expect a higher growth of 6%, we need to put extra effort in terms of productivity, investment, competitiveness and choice of sectorial investment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, growth per se is not the most important variable, but growth distributed with equity and fairness carries greater socio-economic impact. That is why I particularly appreciate the Community Development Programme because it shows that despite difficult times and constraining debt and deficit issues, the hon. Minister rises above circumstances to provide Rs5.7 billion, which has both social and economic implications, facilitating the daily life of every citizen. This Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is uplifting the people to a new level. Mr Speaker, Sir, in April 2021, the World Economic Outlook Report, the IMF in its April 2021 World Economic Outlook Report, the IMF forecast world output to grow by 6% in 2021 and 4.4% in 2022. Similarly, according to its June 2021 Global Economic Prospects Report, the World Bank has predicted, Mr Speaker, Sir, global real GDP growth to be at 5.6% in 2021 and 4.3% in 2022, respectively. Unfortunately, we know that in 2020 global inflation was at 3.2%. It is expected to reach 3.5% in 2021 amidst rising commodity prices and disruptions in supply chain before tempering to 3.2% in 2022. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have lost 17.9% in terms of GDP growth, contracting by 14.9% in 2020, yet international projection for the country is optimistic, with strong recovery anticipated in the medium-term. The African Economic Outlook, Mr Speaker, Sir, which was issued in March of this year projects GDP growth to stand at an average of 7.1% for the next two years, while the IMF Outlook issued in April 2021 estimates a growth rate of 6.6% for the year 2021. Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding that unfortunately several *détracteurs* are still arguing the decision of the Government to protect jobs and incentive investment. In fact, by doing so, we are just creating a perception and that we are against international advice. Actually, the International Monetary Fund has commended the policies taken by the Mauritius Government, and on that, I commend my hon. friend and colleague, the Minister of Finance.

Let me summarise and quote the main points established by the IMF mission in 2021, four points, Mr Speaker, Sir –

- (i) Mauritius has been successful in containing the COVID-19 virus thanks to strict health measures;
- (ii) in the short-term, accommodative fiscal and monetary instances are appropriate. As the country emerges from the pandemic, fiscal consideration will be necessary to stabilise public debt and monetary policy measures will need to be strengthened;
- (iii) Thirdly, during the recovery phase, Mauritius should prioritise support measures to improve the country's economy, resilience and competitiveness and accelerate its long-term structural transformation.

But when we look at the proposals of this budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the structure of the budget proposed to the country, I am just highlighting this, Mr Speaker, Sir, to demonstrate that the IMF has never impressed for strict fiscal consolidation but has rather supported Mauritius recovery phase and has advocated for fiscal stabilisation after the recovery phase. This is what precisely the Minister did, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is exactly what this Government has done. And we like it or not, we have done that for the benefit of the many, to support the vulnerable and not for the pleasure of a few.

And this Government will keep on supporting the needy. Mr Speaker, Sir, when we read comments in the Press, in the social media and when we, unfortunately, listened to some Opposition Members, the impression they want to create is that there is a dark cloud lurking in the horizon. As if Mauritius will be invaded by a race from another planet. Yes, COVID-19 is a threat but humanity, Mr Speaker, Sir, has faced greater threat. The world has faced greater threat, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Black Death, the bubonic plague caused more casualties. Today, technology and advances in technology have offered a thick protection layer and above all hope, Mr Speaker, Sir. Our plea to the nation is to envision our future with hope so that it makes our daily life a pleasant experience.

To me, this project is a budget which instils confidence which should trigger the right signals for recovery, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is what I wanted to say on the economic fundamentals.

Now if you would allow me, I shall turn to one measure contained in the budget that could trigger a new era of growth. In fact, there are several pertinent measures, which could

go in the direction of igniting growth in this country or setting the foundation for a major upholding of our economy but I will take one, Mr Speaker, Sir. And my friend, hon. Lesjongard as Minister of Energy and Public Utilities has already commented on that but as a previous Minister of Energy, I wanted to make a few comments on this sector although hon. Lesjongard has practically covered this sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this section has arrested my attention - reshaping of a new economic architecture. In fact, this is the central and dominant strategy. I quote from a book on energy Mr Speaker, Sir, which says -

“Energy is vital to life, to economic growth and to development. It is important as a major job generating sector, it creates value to the economy through capturing energy from nature, wind solar power and marine or ocean driven power and through a process of extraction transformation and distribution. It is the oxygen of the economy.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the energy business is not only an enormous market but it has tremendous socio-economic and environmental implications that can usher our country as a forefront to reap an endless stream of benefits. We are late, Mr Speaker, Sir, despite having all the resources such as wind, solar and ocean, we equally have a rising hoard of human skills who are slowly making their names in international circles, whom we are not exploiting to the maximum but it is never too late.

The Budget Speech announces a major ambitious target, 60% of our energy needs by 2030. As a previous Minister of Energy, I reckon this is a tall order but I am confident under the stewardship of our friend, colleague, Minister Lesjongard by putting extra efforts, more investment, creating more high paid jobs, developing high demand, we will be able to reach that target. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to double our efforts and that will inevitably lead to the creation of more jobs and greater wealth.

CEB will invest Rs5.3 billion. Investing in new battery capacities to improve its absorption capacity of intermittent source of energy, the wider use of these renewable sources is a major business opportunity for investors to consider local production of solar panels and wind turbines. Not only for the local market but also for the African market through our existing regional trade agreements. Mr Speaker, Sir, why should we invest in the energy sector? Across the world today, investments in stocks are generating huge streams of benefit.

Mauritius, as the Minister reminded us, has signed an agreement such as the Paris Agreement to bring down temperatures by 2 degrees. Between 1950 and 2012, Mr Speaker, Sir, average temperatures have increased by 1.4 degree Centigrade. We have no choice than to cut down on fossil fuel and raise our production and consumption of renewable energy and the hon. Minister rightly said, today coal is being phased out worldwide and coal projects are not even being considered by funding agencies. So, across the world, Mr Speaker, Sir, the advance in technology has cut down on cost and wind energy can be supplied at lower cost than fossil fuel, coal or even solar energy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, many reports, I do not have to go through these reports, the Chinese Government, the US Department of energy, Bloomberg, India indicated trend of rapid substitution of fossil fuel by renewable energy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Denmark with a population of 5million people, has got 100% clean energy tapped from wind energy, Mr Speaker, Sir. I could have given examples of other countries, but I will stop here on this sector, Mr Speaker, Sir. And you will allow me to comment on the sector for which I'm responsible, the transport sector, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Transport is the heart of development and the artery of productivity. As we notice, the Metro Express is causing revolution, not only in economic behaviour, in terms of sharpening our competitive edge, but it is equally important in our social behaviour and in respect of environmental norms. Mr Speaker, Sir, tomorrow the Prime Minister is going to launch Phase 2A. As we know, the phase from Port Louis to Rose Hill started operation in January 2020. Since then 3.7 million people, commuters, have already travelled from Port Louis to Rose Hill. And a recent survey has published the satisfaction of these commuters with regard to the Light Rail Services. Undoubtedly, the Metro Express is a success story, Mr Speaker, Sir. It provides an alternative, safe, accessible, rapid, clean and reliable mode of transport.

And on top of that, with the implementation of Urban Terminals in connection with the Metro and other initiatives of the private sector around the island, the whole landscape across the island will be revamped. Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the Prime Minister is launching Phase 2A tomorrow, from Rose Hill to Quatre Bornes and with this new alignment, with this new extension to the alignment to Quatre Bornes, passenger from additional regions - from the region of Résidence Kennedy, Ollier, Palma, Berthaud, Bassin and Sodnac will all be able to travel by the light rail vehicle. Mr Speaker, Sir, we will be introducing a shuttle bus service to provide the first and last mile connectivity to the Metro Express and to better integrate the light rail with other modes of transport.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government, the Prime Minister has a vision to regenerate the transport system of this country. Studies are being carried out to investigate the potential extension of the Metro Express Network across the island. And in the same vein, Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that Ebène Cybercity has proven to be an area of growth in Mauritius, as you know, the Metro alignment will be extended from Rose Hill to Réduit through. Ébène. An amount of Rs4.5 billion has been provided in the next financial year. And here, I would like to reply to the comments made by hon. Osman Mahomed on this particular issue of the extension to Ébène and Rose Hill, Mr Speaker, Sir. He commented on this extension from Rose Hill to Ébène during his speech and I would like to reply to the hon. Member and to inform him, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this decision for the extension of Rose Hill to Ébène/Réduit was based on studies that had been carried out.

Firstly, studies show that in the whole city area of Ébène, there will be more than 50,000 workers which will account for nearly 10 per cent of the total employment in Mauritius. Ébène Cybercity has also become a preferred location for both public and private sector officers. It is considered as a critical business hub, Mr Speaker, Sir for ongoing economic development. Therefore, it remains a strong influenced area to connect to the current LRT system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, there is a high density of education and health institutions in the region of Ebène. It is estimated that the student population includes more than 10,000 pupils, Tertiary Education Commission figures, Mr Speaker, Sir and accounts for 27 of the total tertiary education enrolment in the country. The health employment accounted for more than 12% of total employment, Mr Speaker, Sir, hence, the decision of Government to extend the Light Rail Network to Réduit as a priority project.

With regard to the feasibility study in 2016, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE) reviewed the feasibility and optimisation of the alignment design from Port Louis to Curepipe and consequently, the cost was brought down to Rs18.8 billion for the 26 Km. In fact, this project is only costing Government Rs9 billion as half of the cost is being financed as a grant and the other half as a preferential loan from the Indian Government. Need I say, Mr Speaker Sir, when we compare the previous Government's project which was to the tune of Rs37 billion, excluding operation costs, as already highlighted in my previous reply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this very study, SCE carried out the feasibility study of this line and recommended for an extension line from Rose Hill to Réduit. Mr Speaker, Sir, with Rs9 billion - this is important for hon. Mohamed to understand - we are doing 26Km plus Rs4.5 billion which means that the project is costing Rs13.55 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are completing a project of 29.4 Km but the previous project of the previous Government was Rs37 billion for only 26 Km.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the project of this present Government - I am clarifying matters again - Port Louis to Curepipe including Rose Hill, Ebène, Réduit will costs Rs9 billion plus Rs4.5 billion, which means Rs13.55 billion. The previous Government's project; from Port Louis to Curepipe, only Rs37 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, even including the extension of Rose-Hill to Ebène-Réduit, the project of the former Government is about 3 times more expensive than the present project being undertaken by Government today, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, there was also a due diligence committee, Mr Speaker, Sir, which looks at all the figures. I do not want to repeat what I have said in my PQ, to us, Mr Speaker, Sir, this due diligence committee has validated the cost of the project and, therefore, in view of the ridership which will increase, Mr Speaker, Sir, which will, of course, be beneficial to the Metro Project, to us, the right decision has been taken. And with regard to the number of trains which he asked, I must inform him that the number of trains available now will be sufficient to provide a service to the extension line towards Réduit. There will be no need to buy any additional trains. This line is to capture, I repeat, some 10,000 to 12,000 passengers commuting towards Réduit and Ebène, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, this is the point I wanted to make concerning the Metro Project, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a few words on Road Safety. With regard to Road Safety which is, in fact, a thorny problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, *afin de diminuer le nombre et les risques des accidents, continue à prendre des mesures nécessaires afin qu'il ait moins d'accidents sur nos routes*. I do not have to go into the details of the investment that we are doing in this sector, Mr Speaker, Sir. For the current financial year, works in connection with road markings, traffic signs, footpaths, Mr Speaker, Sir, delineators for safe night driving and investment in all these infrastructure or road furniture as we call them, *ralentisseurs*, traffic-calming measures, all this, Mr Speaker, Sir, are being addressed and my Ministry has even initiated actions for setting speed limits at the appropriate level for the road and ensuring compliance in our cities and important villages.

The United Nations recently advocated the introduction of 30Km/h in towns and villages which are being used by pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. In that respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, after a detailed survey analysis, my Ministry is presently setting speed limits below the national speed limits in major towns and villages of Mauritius starting with Port Louis and extending to important villages such as Goodlands, Flacq and so on. The speed limit of our main collector streets of the central business area of Port Louis for instance, Pope Hennessy Street, Labourdonnais Street, Volcy Pougnat Street and D'Entrecasteaux would be 40km/h while the lateral roads abutting on these main collector streets, the speed would be limited at 30km/h. This is in line with the National Road Safety Strategy 2016-2025, and will also result in less pollution, thus promoting sustainable local travel.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will also construct an arrester bed along the segment of M1, where at the beginning of this year, an accident took place where some Bangladeshi workers died. You will remember at Sorèze Montebello, Mr Speaker, Sir. There will be an arrester bed which will be a side road specifically constructed to slow down and to stop heavy vehicles that encounter breaking problems when descending the steep slow path, Sorèze and Montebello, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, still on the chapter of road safety, unfortunately, the number of fatal road accidents registered on our roads stood for, this year, at 46, at the time we are talking and the number of persons killed was 48, Mr Speaker, Sir, and out of this figure, 50% are young people, riders on motorcycles. Time and again, we are still witnessing that young motorcycle riders are involved in accidents which lead to their death, unfortunately. We have taken several measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we have also made specific provisions through the law for electric motorcycles. We have amended regulations, unfortunately, to make the penalties more severe, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we have no choice because, unfortunately many of these youngsters on their motorcycles are still behaving imprudently on our roads.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have also regulated for riders of motorcycles to wear helmets, fluorescent jackets, undergo driving tests and these measures will further improve safety on our roads. The general policy of my Ministry is to toughen the existing legal framework in order to make drivers more responsible. So, we are reducing the number of cumulative offences from five to four offences over a period of three years as compared to two years, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are innovating also, we are improving safety on our roads and the law will be providing, for a probationary period to new driving license holders so as to encourage and instil a proper driving culture. In fact, those who are newly licensed drivers commit a road

traffic offence during their probationary period, they will require more time to secure a full driving license until no road traffic offence is committed by them over a determined period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also coming up with different initiatives in terms of sensitisation, in terms of education, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, the last one that we came up was a National Drawing Contest on Road Safety for Primary School Students on the theme: Street for Life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this competition is still going on and we are trying to sensibilise the youngsters, the kids of this country in the schools or organising many projects in the school, safety march, slams and drawing competition to promote the practice of road safety by roads users, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will just end up on that chapter commenting on electric vehicles. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the House that following the national dialogue held under the seven cycle of the global environment facility, the GEF Council has recommended the submission of a project concept regarding promoting low-carbon electric public bus transport in Mauritius and this proposal is on the agenda, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In that regard, the GEF is envisaging to grant technical assistance and support to our country to ease the transition to electric buses. We are expecting the procurement of around 60 electric buses and 10 charging stations are being envisaged.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the NTC also because of the difficult situation facing all traffic and all operators of the bus industry, it would not have been possible for the Corporation to finance the replacement of aging buses, but fortunately Mr Speaker, Sir, in his Budget, the hon. Minister has allotted the necessary sum to purchase 25 electric buses and we are very grateful to the hon. Minister. So, Government will finance the procurement of 25 electric buses for the NTC and this will constitute an unprecedented move for the NTC. With these electric buses, the NTC will embrace new technology and promote sustainable transport services while at the same time it will rid itself of its aging fleet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we will continue to bolster the bus transport industry, modernise public transport and the bus networks as always and still plays a major role in this multimodal transport system. There are about 2,000 buses carrying per day 400,000 passengers on our roads daily and this is no small fleet, Mr Speaker, Sir. Workers, students, seniors citizens depend on the bus network and we owe it to them to pay careful attention to this sector with a

view to improve the quality of service and render this industry sustainable for the bus operators and their 8,000 or so employees.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a need to review, to rethink, to re-engineer the bus transport industry in Mauritius because fleet modernisation is indeed an important component of the solution. Government has increased subsidies on the purchase of new diesel and electric buses in this Budget. We need new buses that are more efficient to run and more environment friendly. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also seeking assistance from other Government and the UNDP for the acquisition of more buses including electric vehicles in the short and medium term but what we need also is to introduce more advanced in vehicle technologies and intelligent systems to help operators better manage the operation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I unfortunately will stop here on the transport sector but I wanted to remind the House also that we came up recently with a Taxi Operators Welfare Fund, we are coming up, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I am grateful to my friend and colleague the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, who has agreed to that proposal, a Tourism Contract Bus Owners Association made a request for a Welfare Fund to be set up in respect of the contact bus licenses.

According to statistics available at the NLTA, there are nearly 6,000 contract buses license to convey school children, employees and tourists and these operators *ban ti van*, Mr Speaker, Sir, *ti van 15 plas*, they have played a vital role in ensuring the mobility of different segments of the population. So, in the weeks to come, of course, with the agreement of Government, a Contract Bus Operators Welfare Fund will be set up to cater for their welfare, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is, as far as the transport sector is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come very briefly on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. Mr Speaker, Sir, if you will allow me, because this is an important Ministry and I am sure Members will be interested to know the developments that are taking place with regard to this Ministry because in the aftermath of the second wave of the pandemic, Mr Speaker, Sir, the objective and the focus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade has been to reinforce the extension of our diplomatic relations at bilateral and multilateral level with a view to create opportunities to set the stage for an economic recovery based on strong growth and at creating opportunities for exports of goods and services as well as to promote foreign direct investment.

This year can be considered as a historic year for our trade relations with key partners, Mr Speaker, Sir. Trade is wealth, Mr Speaker, Sir. For the first time in our history, four crucial Free Trade Agreements entered into force since the beginning of this year, covering some 70% of the world population. These FTAs are also vital in our quest to diversify our markets and to create additional export and investment opportunities for the country.

Mauritius and China signed a Free Trade Agreement which entered into force in 01 January of this year. The FTA eliminates tariff for Mauritius from the Chinese market for about 8,500 products, Mr Speaker, Sir. Regarding India, the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (CECPA) was signed on 22 February of this year, entered into force on 01 April of this year, and under this agreement with India, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will benefit from professional preferential market access to a list of 615 products. It opens a considerable market opportunities in about 100 service sector, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Thirdly, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the UK on its part is a continuity agreement which preserves a full duty and quota free market access on the UK market for Mauritius. It entered into force on 01 January of this year and then we have the African Continental Free Trade Market to which I will come in a few minutes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, negotiations on all these trades agreement were conducted with participation of key stakeholders from the public and the private sector and regarding the FTA with China, a two-day Natural Sensitisation Workshop was jointly organised by my Ministry and the Economic Development Board in March of this year. As regards to the CECPA also with India, a series of virtual sensitisation sessions have been held jointly with our High Commission in New Delhi, the EDB and the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In this regard, virtual meetings have been held recently with the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, with the Confederation of Indian industry on 07 June of this year and last week, the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry on 15 June more precisely.

The objective of all these sessions were to showcase trade and investment opportunities under the agreement and how the Indian and Mauritian business communities could collaborate to explore potentials on the African continent, Mr Speaker, Sir.

For us to achieve growth in a quick and sustainable manner, we cannot rely solely on domestic mobilisation. This is the point. We also need assistance from our partner countries and international financial institution. Our missions abroad will play a crucial role, Mr

Speaker, Sir, in tackling those resources which will come not only by way of financial assistance but also through capacity building and technical expertise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our missions will be called upon to come forward with a well-defined action plan over the coming year with clear targets and objectives. The close ties with friendly countries, such as India and China has been instrumental, Mr Speaker, Sir, to ensure our access to vaccines such as the Covishield and the Sinopharm. These enabled us to kick-start our vaccination program and work towards our target to vaccinate 60% of the population as soon as possible in a beat to achieve herd immunity. We will continue to use our diplomatic network to engage with friendly countries to ensure that its sanitary requirements are met and we may safely open our borders and reopen our economy to the new normal, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The possibility for production of COVID-19 vaccines in Mauritius is being considered and we will seek local and international partnership to implement this project with a view to supply vaccines to the region. Mr Speaker, Sir, in this context, I must inform the House, a few days ago, Thursday last, Mr Speaker, Sir, while I was chairing the first meeting of African Ministers of the WTO this week, I put across the need for the WTO to ensure a balanced and equitable distribution of vaccines across the world and in particular to Africa, which is in dire need of vaccination in order to win the battle against the pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is deplorable and I said it at this virtual conference, which was attended by the new Director General, the lady as we know, Mr Speaker, Sir, Mrs Ngozi and several African Ministers were there and it was *le vœu*. There was a consensus, Mr Speaker, Sir, deplorable, that Africa has been allocated only 1% of its requirement of vaccines and is far behind, both, Mr Speaker, Sir, in terms of vaccine requirements in its vaccination program.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I highlighted that this situation should be addressed as a matter of priority. I feel a bit embarrassed to quote myself, Mr Speaker, Sir, but this is what I said –

“Today, less than 1% of Africans are fully vaccinated out of the 66 million doses that COVAX was supposed to deliver to Africa by May 2021, only 19 million doses, that is, less than one-third have reached our continent because of the hijacking of vaccines by certain countries. There is no equitable distribution as a natural predisposition of humanity to cooperate in times of crisis, has been overtaken by selfish and self-defeating competition. We are victims of the notorious vaccine nationalism. While we

welcome the G7 summit pledge to supply, 1 billion vaccine doses to developing countries over the coming 12 months period, we also note that it falls disappointingly short of the WHO confirmed minimum requirement of 11 million doses over that same period.”

The G7 Nations did at least acknowledge the urgent need for global production of COVID-19 vaccines to be wrap up including in developing countries where capacity exists, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is why I think we should applaud that as a caring Government, the hon. Prime Minister has been personally chairing the High-Level Committee on COVID-19 on a daily basis, since March and we have given the green light to embark on a strategy to develop a viable pharmaceutical industry for the production of vaccines.

In this regard, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will pursue its strategy of vaccine diplomacy with a view to achieve the herd immunity at the earliest. Mr Speaker, Sir, and I am harder than proud to inform the House and the country at large, that under the Chairmanship of our hon. Prime Minister and with the help of the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, today, Mr Speaker, Sir, an expression of interest for the development of a pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry in Mauritius has been launched officially and activities of interest, I can read –

“Government has identified the following parallel priority areas for pharmaceutical and vaccine manufacturing related activities, COVID-19 vaccines.”

And then there is a list of other vaccines, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, when this was announced into the budget, the hon. Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development or Government, we were not bluffing, Mr Speaker, Sir, and all the hon. Ministers, who were at these WTO videoconference Thursday last, they all, *ils ont appelé de leurs vœux*, Mr Speaker, Sir, that a maximum of our African countries should be given the means, the investment necessary to set up manufacturing plants because contrary to what somebody from the Opposition said, there is no predictability of what is going to happen to our world, this year, next year, what type of pandemic will again come and which we will have to face, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, the point, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are making, is that it was the wish of all of African countries. Ghana has set up its factory, South Africa, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we know and I think Mauritius also, we have the possibility, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I know that many

countries will come and help us and with this expression of interest being launched today, this will show how serious Mauritius is within a matter of days after the announcement in the budget, the expression of interest has been launched, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, with regard to our privileged relationship with India and China, the recent signing of the CEPCA, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the outcome of long negotiations. As I said, the CEPCA is not just a bilateral agreement between Mauritius and India. It has a broader regional dimension. The Free Trade Agreement with China also, Mr Speaker, Sir, unleashed the potential for further expansion in the creation of a whole that is greater than the sum of its constitution part.

We are further engaged in the deepening of the interim economic partnership agreement with the European Union aims at improving our existing market, and to expand its scope to cover other areas such as services investment, agriculture, and intellectual property, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Even as Japan is concerned, in February this year, an MOU was signed with Japan for a loan agreement. I am nearly over, Mr Speaker, Sir. Rs600 m. for maritime security. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say a few words concerning...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Okay! Order! Carry on.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Members of the Opposition should know...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Duval!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am, unfortunately, in charge of two important Ministries. I had to talk on transport, I am finishing of course.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Duval!

Mr Ganoo: I am finishing on Foreign Affairs, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Africa has been one of the world's fastest-growing region over the past decade. By 2030, this continent will be home to nearly 1.7 billion people and with an estimated USD 6.7 trillion worth of consumer and business spending, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area offers opportunities for Mauritian enterprise to integrate the regional value chain, as well as to promote trade and investment with Africa.

This is also the reason why Mauritius has set its model of economic partnership for creating growth corridors with targeted African states by enabling new cross-border investment opportunities, promotion entrepreneur. It is expected that the trade which started as from 01 January of this year will give a push to our exports on the Continent. The deepening of our engagement with the African continent will continue to be an essential component of our diplomacy. In view of our limited resources, it is essential that we have a focus approach, Mr Speaker, Sir.

We look forward to working closely with the EDB and other stakeholders which are directly involved in the promotion of our African strategy, in order to identify priority countries and sectors in which we have trade and investment opportunities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Africa strategy will also aim at exploring avenues of cooperation in economic growth poles such as –

- (a) the green energy industry;
- (b) the blue economy;
- (c) agriculture;
- (d) agro-processing;
- (e) biotechnology;
- (f) pharmaceutical industry, and
- (g) ICT industry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Joint Commission that has been established with selected African countries has also provided an important framework to strengthen existing bilateral relation and explore new avenues of cooperation. The outbreak of the COVID-19 has, unfortunately slowed down the holding of fresh sessions of the Joint Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we look forward to holding Joint Commission as soon as the sanitary conditions allow us to do that. Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will continue to engage with the African Union in order to achieve the objectives announced in the budget speech, namely economic recovery, triggering revival and strengthening resilience.

Indeed, in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, the role of regional institutions such as the African Union and its agencies is becoming more prominent to ensure high level political commitment and leadership in a wide area of sectors involved in the COVID-19 response. The EU is mobilising international support in favour of Africa's relentless efforts to achieve post COVID-19 sustainable economic recovery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been constantly participating in technical sectorial meetings of the Union to ensure that our concern and interest are safeguarded in the development of common African position. As a facilitator, my Ministry will interface with the African Union to assist in the implementation of the budgetary measures in all the sectors. We have to increase our visibility on the continent and promote and improve our Africa strategy and, if need be, revisit this Africa strategy, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Middle East. Mr Speaker, Sir, we will be participating in the Dubai Expo 2020, which is scheduled to take place from 01 October 2021 to 30 March 2022 in Dubai. Yes, it is still called Dubai Expo 2020.

(Interruptions)

United Arab Emirates, Dubai Expo 2020 will be the first opportunity since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to showcase Mauritius and promote our trade investment and tourism industry. More than 180 countries are expected to be represented, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Expo organisers are expecting around 15 million visitors during the 6 months of the Expo, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The participation in Dubai Expo 2020 will not only strengthen our bilateral relations with the UAE but also increase the visibility of Mauritius in the Gulf region. A special Ministerial Committee has been set up to monitor the progress of works, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the EDB, the Minister of Finance and I will also thank our Ambassador, Mr Showkutally Soodhun, Mr Speaker, Sir, for his contribution....

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order if I may. Everyone has been restricted. I remember our friend, hon. Bodha was cut short within a few minutes of terminating his speech. There are other Senior Members who need to speak and they were hoping to speak at a decent time. Unless we are going to adjourn, I think the hon. Minister must have some respect for people who are going to speak after him. This is not respectful of the people who are speaking after him.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir,...

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: What is happening there?

(*Interruptions*)

An hon. Member: *Pakone!*

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Bérenger: *Il gesticule!*

Mr Speaker: I gave a lot of time to...

Dr. Padayachy: *Il en a le droit!*

An hon. Member: *So lamain ar li!*

(*Interruptions*)

Dr. Padayachy: *Le parlement n'est pas à vous!*

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

Dr. Padayachy: *On a le droit de parler si on en a envie!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Toussaint!

Dr. Padayachy: *On n'a pas à demander votre permission!*

Mr X. L. Duval: You must have some respect for the people speaking after you...

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: He is finishing!

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are very important meetings and rendezvous in the coming months. The 6th AU-EU Summit ...

(*Interruptions*)

I am finishing in 5 minutes; you are wasting the time of the House – which is scheduled to be held in December of this year in Brussels, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Africa-France Summit...

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish also to raise a point of order in the same vein as the point taken by the Leader of the Opposition. Before my colleague, the hon. Boolell spoke at length. Nobody protested; everybody on this side, listened to him patiently.

(Interruptions)

Why should a Government Minister now be bullied by the Opposition into cutting short his speech?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

In a few minutes hon. Duval! Do not create disorder!

(Interruptions)

In a few minutes!

(Interruptions)

Order! In a few minutes, the Minister will finish! In a few minutes!

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not know, you stopped Mr Bodha!

An hon. Member: Not hon. Boolell?

Mr Speaker: Now, this is...

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: We are all Members here!

Mr Speaker: But I did not stop hon. Boolell!

Mr X. L. Duval: I do not know, Sir!

Mr Speaker: I did not stop! You were not here!

(Interruptions)

I did not stop him! What are you talking about! Please!

(Interruptions)

Order! And do not take too much time!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, 5 minutes. I am concluding, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Africa-France Summit due to be held in October of this year, in Montpellier will be forerunner of the EU-AU Summit. Given our profound and dynamic relationship with France, we look forward to participating actively in the discussion in this important Summit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it will be recalled that since the announcement of a second lockdown, a hotline help-desk was set up at the Ministry since 18 March of this year. A database of those stranded together with their contact details has been maintained. And to date, some 2,500 Nationals have been registered with this help-desk hotline, which provides advice and moral support to the callers in view of the various difficulties. We have successfully operated 11 flights from Paris, London, Dubai, South Africa, and India which repatriated 1,725 Mauritian Nationals within a matter of 3 months, Mauritian Nationals and residents, since March of this year, from various parts of the world and this includes countries where Mauritians came from, as far as New Zealand, Australia, and other countries difficult to access such as Rwanda and Senegal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hotline help-desks of our embassies abroad are continuing to provide the necessary support to the stranded Mauritians and residents. I wish to assure the House that my Ministry will provide all the necessary support to ensure the promotion and implementation of this budget which is visionary, innovative and above all, socially inclusive in its approach.

M. le président, avant de conclure, je voudrais personnellement remercier le ministre des Finances. Je parle de la circonscription maintenant pour une minute, M. le président, pour avoir soutenu l'électorat de la circonscription Savanne/Rivière-Noire afin de réaliser tous ces projets infrastructurels cités dans le budget. M. le président, j'ai assisté à au moins 35 débats peut être – *debate speeches* – j'ai été dans la Chambre depuis vous le savez combien de temps. Mais cette fois-ci, tous ces villages mentionnés dans la circonscription Savanne/Rivière-Noire, listés dans ce budget, nous ont fait chaud au cœur. Nous, 3 députés de la circonscription Savanne/Rivière-Noire et l'électorat de la Savanne/Rivière Noire Nous étions élus sur une plateforme qui avait promis le développement, le progrès et l'avancement de la circonscription. J'avais moi-même imploré le ministre des Finances pour que le Conseil de District de Rivière Noire après ce budget, ne plus demeure plus le cendrillon des autorités locales. Mais qui plus est, M. le président, je demanderai à la Chambre et les électeurs de numéro 14 qui m'écoutent d'applaudir ce que j'appellerais le Spiderman et le Batman de Savanne/Rivière Noire.

Je vous donne les raisons, M. le président. Le Spiderman et le Batman sont l'honorable ministre des Finances et l'honorable Bobby Hurreeram et je vous demanderais de les applaudir!

M. le président, 4 nouvelles routes seront construites et compléter avant la fin de ce mandat avec le soutien du ministre des Finances et celui des Infrastructures publiques. Ces 4 nouvelles routes sont les suivantes –

- (i) le M5 qui va relier Mahébourg à la Savanne ; Mahébourg à Rivière des Anguilles, Souillac et Surinam. M. le président, ce sera une route qui aidera la population, nos mandants et aussi les touristes qui débarqueront à SSR Airport pour se diriger vers les hôtels directement à Saint-Félix et à Bel Ombre, M. le président ;
- (ii) la route Flic-en-Flac/Pierrefonds qui a été retardée due à la pandémie et qui maintenant, M. le président, va désenclaver le village Flic-en-Flac, ce village littoral, M. le président ;
- (iii) le Bypass Yemen qui permettra au public voyageur de *by pass* les villages de Tamarins et Rivière Noire pour se diriger vers le sud-ouest du pays ; c'est le Bypass de Yemen;
- (iv) la route de Wolmar à Tamarin, M. le président. Une autre route qui permettra aux habitants de Flic-en-Flac, aux pique-niqueurs d'exiter de Flic-en-Flac pour accéder directement à Tamarin, M. le président.

Et d'après mes renseignements, Médine a déjà entamé les travaux et le soutien des autorités concrétisera ce projet, M. le président. Donc, encore une fois, je remercie le ministre des Finances et mon ami l'honorable Bobby Hurreeram.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget is a continuum of Government continued support to the population in these dire times. Coupled with reflected measures, structured according to well defined strategies to grow the wealth, sustain additional expenditures with a view of long term fiscal consolidation. Whatever has been done since the 11th when the Budget was presented has been done genuinely and intelligently, Mr Speaker, Sir. And we have to applaud the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, better shores are reached by daring to cross the ocean, by surfing the waves and not by lamenting on the issues which are, unfortunately, beyond our control. Let us all, Mr Speaker, Sir, be inspired by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, who despite all odds, demagogic, went forward to create and set the base for a modern Mauritius in the 1980s.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us trust our nation and our people and our capacity to rise back. *Nou pou surmonter, Mr Speaker, Sir ! L'île Maurice prospère juste et solidaire sera toujours là, ce budget est une boîte d'outils, une feuille de route pour faire de notre pays plus prospère, plus solidaire et inclusif. Un poète Turque disait, M. le président –*

« Après chaque crépuscule se lève une aube radieuse. »

Long live the Republic of Mauritius! I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take over. Have a blessed Sunday.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please be seated!

Hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger!

(00:03 a.m.)

Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Il y a trois mois déjà, Moody's *downgraded* l'île Maurice. Quelques jours plus tard, le FMI publia un rapport très critique sur l'île Maurice et peu après, la Banque Mondiale publia un rapport encore plus critique sur l'économie de l'île Maurice. Trois coups de tonnerre dans le ciel économique mauricien, trois sévères avertissements mais tout cela n'a pas empêché le ministre des Finances, dans son discours de budget au paragraphe 428, de déclarer, je *quote* –

“We will ensure that our public finances remain sound.”

‘*Remain sound*’, alors que la vérité est que l'économie mauricienne est dangereusement mal en point et que cela date - comme l'a fait remarquer mon ami le député Ramful - d'avant le COVID-19. C'est pourquoi dans son rapport, la Banque Mondiale, je répète, a écrit –

“The shocks of 2020 (COVID-19, oil spill and inclusion in EU blacklist) came at a time when serious structural cracks were beginning to appear in the foundation of Mauritius' long-term growth model. Even prior to Covid-19 and other events of 2020, Mauritius was on an increasingly fragile development trajectory.”

La présentation du budget était l'occasion de dire la vérité à la population et de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour relancer l'économie du pays. Ça a été malheureusement une occasion ratée. Après le *downgrading* et le rapport du FMI et de la Banque mondiale, nous n'avions pas droit à l'erreur et pourtant. Les chiffres en général présentés dans le budget sont plus manipulés que jamais.

Je commence par le budget, les chiffres concernant le déficit budgétaire ne veulent plus rien dire mais sont plus qu'alarmant. Ne veulent plus rien dire parce qu'il n'y a plus un budget digne de ce nom. R 60 milliards ont été pris dans les coffres de la Banque de Maurice, R 60 milliards l'année dernière et R 80 milliards puisés dans les réserves de la Banque de Maurice pour mettre sur pied le *Mauritius Investment Corporation*.

Pour financer le *Mauritius Investment Corporation* qui va investir, on ne sait pas ce qu'il ne va pas faire le *Mauritius Investment Corporation* dans une absence de transparence totale sans précédent. Les *Special Funds* sont devenus autant de budget parallèle totalement hors de control du Parlement. Plus de R 10 milliards ont été arrachés au *CEB*, la *State Trading Corporation*, la *Financial Services Commission*, le *Mauritius Ports Authority* pour venir financer le budget.

Le déficit budgétaire, le ministre des Finances nous dit, et personne ne le crois, sera de 5 % en 2021/22 mais le fait est que le déficit budgétaire sera de plus que 10 %, plus que le double du chiffre mis en avant par le ministre des Finances. C'est pourquoi je dis qu'il n'y a plus de budget digne de ce nom. Et en plus, il faut parler de la *Mauritius Investment Corporation*, R 80 milliards pris dans les réserves.

Pourtant pas un mot sur la *Mauritius Investment Corporation* dans le discours du budget, pas un mot alors que la Banque mondiale et le FMI ont bien dit que ce n'est pas le rôle de la Banque Centrale de gérer ce genre de compagnies, d'institutions. Ce n'est pas le rôle de la Banque centrale, c'est évident, et le FMI et la Banque mondiale ont demandé si le gouvernement veut créer une *Mauritius Investment Corporation*, que ce soit financé à travers le budget de l'État. Mais bien sûr si c'est financé à travers le budget de l'état, on devine ce que le déficit budgétaire va devenir.

Et maintenant l'affaire Betamax, R 6 milliards qui finiront par sortir des poches des consommateurs et des contribuables. Quand la Bramer Bank et la *BAI* ont été liquidées, le gouvernement d'alors avait promis que pas un sou d'argent public ne serait utilisé pour

financer cette liquidation de l'empire *BAI*. Fort tard, finalement ça coûtera plus de 20 milliards, ça coûte déjà, plus de R 20 milliards.

Après la *BAI*, Betamax, après 20 milliards, 6 milliards et dans le budget, comme je l'ai fait remarquer l'autre jour, il était prévu que le gouvernement obtienne R 2.4 milliards pour l'année financière qui commence dans quelques jours, 2021-2022, c'est dans la liste des revenus, dans les *Estimates*. Qu'est-ce qui va se passer maintenant qu'il faut payer, dédommager Betamax ? Là aussi, le déficit budgétaire va augmenter et j'ai fait remarquer, pas moi seulement, que chaque jour qui passe coûte aux contribuables R 400 000 en intérêt, sur cette somme que le gouvernement ou la STC, ou les deux ensemble, auront à payer.

Et là je pose une question, il y a un *Supplementary Estimate* de 23.6 milliards qui a été adoptés par le conseil des ministres vendredi dernier, c'est dans le *Cabinet* communiqué, est-ce qu'en partie ce sera utilisé pour payer ce qui aura à être payé à Betamax.

Dans côté budget, il n'y a plus budget digne de ce nom. Le déficit budgétaire sera bien au-dessus de 10 % pour l'année financière qui va commencer dans quelques jours. Ça dans le cas du déficit budgétaire et c'est surtout sur ces deux points-là que la Banque mondiale, le FMI, Moody's, tout le monde a pris position, le déficit budgétaire et la dette publique. J'ai dit quelques mots sur le déficit budgétaire, je vais parler de la dette publique. Il est évident que la dette publique a déjà dépassé 100 % du *GDP* et c'est la critique le plus sévère que le FMI et la Banque mondiale et Moody's ont émis. Pas seulement cela, j'entends l'honorable Collendavelloo dire –

« Ainsi clairement, il n'est pas à jour »

Mais la part, nous étions très fiers que la part de la dette étrangère dans notre dette publique était minime, plus maintenant, c'est arrivé à 30 % de notre dette qui est aujourd'hui dette étrangère que nous devons aux pays, aux institutions étrangères. Et nous savons tous et c'est injuste. Nous savons tous que les emprunts garantis par le gouvernement dans les corps paraétatiques, les *special purpose vehicles*, *you name them*, les prêts garantis par le gouvernement ne sont pas inclus à ce jour dans la dette publique ; c'est de l'irresponsabilité.

Dans son budget, l'honorable ministre nous dit que de 95 % du *GDP* en juin 2021, la dette étrangère passera à 91% du *GDP* à juin 2022. Les chiffres sont encore une fois manipulés mais même les chiffres de l'honorable ministre, les chiffres dans les *Estimates* montrent que la dette passera de 420 milliards *as at June 2021* à 500 milliards *as at June*

2024 et cela si le gouvernement n'emprunte pas à nouveau comme ils viennent de le faire, massivement. On devine jusqu'où ira la dette publique du pays.

Et encore il faut ajouter les 28 milliards. L'honorable ministre des Finances et la banque de Maurice sont devenus experts en linguistique. La banque de Maurice a sorti un communiqué pour dire que ces 28 milliards là sont considérés comme une avance sur les profits qu'ils vont faire. Il faudrait presque 100 ans de dividendes de la banque de Maurice sur la base des dividendes qui ont été payés ces derniers temps, presque 100 ans pour arriver à ces 28 milliards. Il y avait dans ses *Estimates* et dans ses déclarations l'honorable ministre des Finances dit –

« Non c'est pas une avance, c'est rien du tout, La banque de Maurice a donné et nous avons pris. »

Which is which ? Ce n'est pas sérieux et c'est dangereux pour la crédibilité et de la banque de Maurice et de l'honorable ministre des Finances. Donc, avec raison malheureusement le FMI et la banque mondiale dénoncent avant tout ce qui est en train de se passer à l'île Maurice concernant le déficit budgétaire et la dette public.

Quant au *current account* qui demeure le meilleur baromètre de l'état de l'économie, quant au *current account* et la balance des paiements, le déficit augmente année après année. Les chiffres sont effrayants quand on examine où est arrivé le déficit du *current account* mais aussi le déficit de la balance des paiements. Les chiffres sont véritablement effrayants. et ça on n'y échappe pas parce que là on *deal* avec l'étranger.

Dans le cas de l'inflation, avec la dépréciation en cours et qui va continuer, en partie pour refaire les réserves. J'allais oublier de dire que malgré cette grave détérioration du déficit de la balance des paiements et du *current account*, jusqu'à présent les réserves se maintiennent. Avant tout, grâce à trois prêts massifs qui sont venus s'ajouter à notre endettement et obtenu récemment de la caisse française de développements, de l'*African Development Bank* et du Japon mais jusqu'à quand on va continuer comme ça ?

Dans le cas de l'inflation comme je le disais, avec la dépréciation de la roupie, l'augmentation du fret international, la récente augmentation sur le diesel et l'essence, inévitablement, l'inflation est déjà reparti, et je n'ai aucun doute que d'ici la fin de l'année l'inflation aura atteint ou dépassé 5 %.

Le chômage, les chiffres sont là aussi totalement manipulés. On ne va pas pinailler. Mais je dis 100, 000 pour reprendre le chiffre que le ministre lui-même avait prévu. Et avec

la fin du *Wage Assistance Scheme* et du *Self-employed Assistance Scheme* dans quelques semaines, et aussi avec la fin de l’interdiction de licenciement dans quelques semaines, c’est effrayant franchement. C’est triste, mais c’est effrayant. Voilà pour moi la vérité ! Voilà pour moi pourquoi le FMI, la Banque mondiale, Moody’s nous ont traités comme ils nous ont traités. Il n’est pas trop tard pour cesser de manipuler les chiffres et pour dire la vérité à la population. Mais la vérité c’est aussi pour voir les choses en face, je ne le dis pas de gaieté de cœur mais la vérité c’est aussi que la relance de l’économie, malheureusement, sera très difficile ; très difficile. Tout le monde doit s’y mettre, mais ce sera très difficile, et la relance sera particulièrement difficile dans le secteur du tourisme, secteur qui affecte beaucoup de monde, des milliers et des milliers, pas seulement dans le secteur lui-même mais tout autour ; des milliers et des milliers de Mauriciennes et de Mauriciens sont touchés. Ce sera particulièrement difficile de relancer le tourisme, pourtant le ministre des Finances prévoit 650,000 touristes en un an, à partir de juillet. Un an ! 650 000 touristes, c’est la moitié des meilleurs chiffres avant la COVID. Ce serait tellement beau, mais ce n’est pas possible. Voyons les choses en face, et d’ailleurs, et le FMI et la Banque mondiale prévoient que le secteur *will remain subdued at least through 2022*, c’est-à-dire, qu’on ne peut pas espérer une vraie relance, et même-là c’est difficile, une vraie relance dans le secteur du tourisme avant 2023. Il faut tous qu’on s’y mette, mais il ne faut pas qu’on se leurre non plus, M. le président.

En Europe, avant que les touristes européens, parce que c’était notre marché préférentiel avant que les touristes européens viennent jusqu’à nous, le *long haul* avec la prise du Covid a pris un mauvais coup et ne se relèvera pas facilement, et parmi les documents que j’ai lus ces derniers jours, il y a une interview du ministre des Finances de Singapour. La chaîne de télévision CNBC, le titre, « *Air travel in Asia won’t return to pre-Covid levels ‘anytime soon,’ says Singapore Minister*. La situation est bien, bien difficile du côté du tourisme et je vois que le ministre annonce qu’il faut atteindre le *herd immunity by September*, alors que nous ne savons même pas d’où les prochains vaccins vont venir. *Herd immunity !* Même ce concept de *herd immunity* se traîne par terre ! L’exemple le plus choquant ces derniers temps : « *herd immunity*, quand 70-80 % de la population auront été vaccinée. » Le Chile a vacciné 58 %, *fully vaccinated* ; 75% de sa population a reçu la première dose. Le titre de la BBC lundi dernier : « *Covid-19 pandemic: Chile capital locks down despite mass vaccination.* » Nous avons un virus vicieux, un virus plus intelligent que tous les hommes et femmes de sciences du monde entier. Personne ne sait plus combien de

temps la protection des virus actuellement administrés, combien de temps ça va durer, et personne ne sait quelle sera la prochaine variante. Comme on dit en créole, « *sa virus la per ran tou dimoun fou* » ; *couyon*, plutôt ; pardon, je crois que ce n'est pas parlementaire. C'est terrible et tout ça pèse sur notre industrie du tourisme. D'ailleurs le ministre lui-même dans son discours du budget, il prévoit, je cite au paragraphe 408 –

« *Hence, vaccination programs will have to be rolled out on a regular basis to continuously protect the health of our citizens.* ”

C'est vrai, on parle d'une troisième dose, on ne sait pas combien de temps le vaccin va nous protéger. On ne sait pas quelles nouvelles variantes vont faire surface ; hier, c'était l'Afrique du Sud, aujourd'hui, c'est l'Inde, et nous sommes en plein au milieu. Donc, ça ne va pas être facile. On nous dit qu'à partir du 15 juillet, on va *welcome* les touristes étrangers, *mais they will not be allowed to leave the hotel in which they stay, they will have to stay in one accredited hotel; they will have the beach in front*. Mais est-ce que ça peut continuer, une situation où les touristes, s'ils viennent, parce que les lignes aériennes aussi il faudra voir comment que ça évolue. Ça ne peut pas continuer, qu'on va permettre aux touristes de profiter de la mer, de la plage, ‘notre plage, notre mer’, et les Mauriciens n'auront pas le droit, ni d'entrer dans l'eau, ni d'être sur la plage. Mais ça ne peut pas continuer ! Donc, ça va être un flop ça, la première étape, et ensuite à partir du 1^{er} octobre, ce qui a été annoncé, tous les touristes sont acceptés, mais tests PCR, avec raison. On va voir comment ça va évoluer mais la relance dans le secteur du tourisme va être bien, bien difficile et c'est dramatique où Air Mauritius est ces temps-ci. On ne voit rien à l'horizon. J'exprime, en passant, toute ma solidarité avec les employés d'*Air Mauritius* et d'*Air Mate*. Sans *Air Mauritius*, ce sera encore plus difficile, sinon impossible de vraiment relancer le secteur du tourisme. Je ne joue pas au rabat-joie, mais il faut voir les choses en face, et la vérité c'est que la relance du secteur du tourisme sera bien difficile, mais nous devons tous nous y mettre.

L'industrie sucrière est toujours dans une situation très difficile, et de mon point de vue, l'industrie sucrière avec ses planteurs, ses artisans, ses laboureurs et tout ce qui a autour, allaient vers un désastre à moyen terme. C'est pourquoi nous approuvons la nouvelle méthode de rémunération de la bagasse, entre autres choses. C'est pourquoi nous approuvons la nouvelle méthode de rémunération de la bagasse entre autre chose et il est bon que dans le budget, on ait prévu R 1.4 milliards en 2021-22 *for, I quote –*

“*Support to sugar cane planters and biomass framework.* ”

Mais rendez au moins public le rapport de la Banque mondiale sur l'industrie sucrière. Dites la vérité ! Les syndicats, les travailleurs et les planteurs le demandent et je le demande à nouveau. Il n'y a aucune raison et je ne dis pas qu'il faut tout approuver. Non. Mais nous sommes un peuple adulte, nous avons droit à la vérité, nous avons droit au rapport de la Banque mondiale entre autres choses.

Nous sommes d'accord aussi avec l'idée de *phase out coal*. *Le sens* est un petit peu ambigu ce qui est dit dans le discours du budget. *Phased out coal before 2030. Pas as at 2030, before 2030.* Nous sommes d'accord qu'on fasse le maximum pour en finir avec le charbon. Mais il faut être un peu plus précis.

Liquified natural gas, quel 'tamtam' l'ancien ministre n'a pas fait ? Combien d'argent on n'a pas dépensé ? Aujourd'hui, pas un mot dans le discours du budget. *Liquified natural gas* disparu et même pas - avec un peu de respect, le gouvernement aurait expliqué pourquoi et combien a été dépensé dans l'intervalle sur le *liquified natural gas*. C'est un manque de respect.

Renewable energy, l'île Maurice a perdu beaucoup de temps. L'autre jour. j'allais chez quelqu'un à Belle Mare. Je regardais combien des éoliennes fonctionnaient, étaient en marche. On a perdu beaucoup de temps, beaucoup d'occasions pour développer *all out* les énergies renouvelables. Mais il n'est pas trop tard, d'ailleurs, on n'a pas d'alternatif. On est condamné à développer au maximum les énergies renouvelables. *We are all for*. Le MMM a toujours été *all for* le développement des énergies renouvelables.

Mais j'ai écouté attentivement le ministre Lesjongard. Bon discours sur ce sujet-là. Bon discours ! Mais seulement *easier said than done* ! Il est bon qu'il ait donné beaucoup de renseignements, y compris sur les batteries. *Pa facile sa* ! Il faut être dans l'autre extrême de croire que parce que quel est le problème fondamental dans la production d'électricité. Ce qu'il y a le *baseload* et le *non baseload*. Le *baseload*, c'est ce qui 24 sur 24 est produit par la CEB et les *private operators*. Comment qu'on va faire ça quand on sait que les *renewables* sont intermittents. Quand il y a du soleil, ça va. Quand il y a assez de vent, ça va. Quand il y a un cyclone, ça ne va pas. La nuit ça ne va pas. Donc, *easier said than done*. Mais il faut y aller et j'ai bien noté tout ce que le ministre a dit sur le développement, d'instrument si je peux dire, hybride et sur les nouveautés qui sont en train se développer concernant – mais we are not home yet en ce qui concerne le stockage de l'électricité dans les batteries. *Easier said than done!* Depuis des années on essaye même dans différents pays, y compris aux États-

Unis. Mais on n'a pas le choix. Il faut y aller mais seulement il faut faire attention. Comme je le disais, ce mixe de *baseload* et de *intermittent renewable energy*, il faut bien le mesurer. Il faut bien agencer tout cela. Et aussi il faut garder en tête le coût de production. Nous sommes un *ti pays*. Coût de production pour les exportateurs, tout, en général, coût de production pour les consommateurs aussi. On ne peut pas produire de *renewable energy all out* à un prix exorbitant. Déjà notre secteur manufacturier est en grande difficulté comme on le sait, reçoit de l'aide de l'État. Donc, bien voir le coût de production pour les producteurs et pour les consommateurs. *Easier said than done* mais nous n'avons pas le choix. Et c'est la bonne voie que celle qu'a adopté aujourd'hui le ministre concerné.

Donnez le maximum de renseignement, rendez public le maximum de rapport comme, par exemple, le rapport sur les véhicules électriques. Quand le ministre Ganoo, je crois remplacer le ministre, non, je ne sais pas dans quel contexte mais enfin il a parlé d'un rapport d'experts sur les véhicules électriques. Je me suis précipité et j'ai lu le rapport. Difficile de trouver quelque chose de plus indigeste et de plus difficile à comprendre. Je suggérerai au ministre concerné qu'il faudrait vulgariser, simplifier les grands points de ce rapport pour vraiment encourager les voitures mais les véhicules électriques. Et ça aussi, ce ne sera pas facile de dire qu'on aura des points un peu partout, des points pour *recharge* les batteries. Il faut faire, c'est ce qui se fait à travers le monde mais encore une fois, *easier said than done*.

Comme je disais, je pense qu'il serait bon que le ministre retire le jus de ce rapport et produise à la Mauricienne quelque chose qui sera compris par la population en général, y compris par nous autres parlementaires. Parce que je le redis, ce rapport en question - quand le ministre Ganoo a dit qu'il a lu, je ne le crois pas trop parce qu'il serait tombé malade de lire ce rapport. C'est confus. C'est touffu. C'est indigeste. Donc, il faut populariser, il faut encourager parce qu'on ne l'a pas fait jusqu'à présent. Presque tous les véhicules électriques qui ont été vendus et qui ont été achetés jusqu'à présent sont des véhicules hybrides. Parce que les gens n'ont pas confiance. Où ils vont *recharge* leurs batteries ? Donc, il faut encore une fois bien planifier les choses.

Éolienne ! Je ne sais pas combien parmi nous, à Belle Mare, il y a des grands hôtels, enfin il y avait, des grands hôtels 5-étoiles et c'est un site merveilleux. Une beauté ! Mais qu'on le veuille ou non, le fait qu'il y ait 11 ou 13, j'ai oublié lequel, mais le fait qu'il y ait 11 ou 13 éoliennes plantées là, a gâté le paysage complètement. Ceux qui ne me croient pas, allez voir ! Alignées en face de la mer, alignées en face des hôtels 5-étoiles. Bon, si c'est

inévitable, c'est inévitable. Mais qu'on n'oublie pas que notre intention, c'est de refaire à l'île Maurice, un secteur touristique haut de gamme. Ces éoliennes...

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: ...pour la plupart, font pas mal de bruit.

The Deputy Speaker: May I? Sorry to interrupt you. I live close to Belle Mare. I am wondering, are you correct about the place you are saying? *Éolienne à Belle Mare?*

Mr Bérenger: Bras D'eau!

The Deputy Speaker: Ah Bras D'Eau!

Mr Bérenger: There are no bungalows at Bras D'Eau *mais en face, from the other side de la baie, on voit tout ça.*

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much!

(*Interruptions*)

Order!

Mr Bérenger: Comme je le dis, ça gâte le paysage. Mais si c'est inévitable, okay. Mais qu'on garde en tête que ça a un prix pour un pays aussi touristique que Maurice. Il est bon qu'on ait eu tous les renseignements qu'on a eus aujourd'hui mais rendez public le rapport. J'aimerais savoir ce que la Banque mondiale a à dire sur la production d'énergie renouvelable.

J'ai mes doutes sur la biomasse. J'espère qu'on pourra, parce que si l'industrie sucrière s'était écroulée, c'était la fin de la bagasse. Or, les gens ne se rendent pas compte que plus de 20% - on cite des chiffres, voilà - de notre énergie renouvelable, c'est la bagasse. Et moi je suis fière, on a été à l'avant-garde. Depuis des années, on s'est battu pour ça. Et si l'industrie sucrière s'écroulait, fini *bagasse*! Quand a biomasse moi, j'aimerais avoir les rapports d'expert. Et je dis *easier said than done*.

Biomasse, feuilles de cannes ou bien même, il y en a d'autres qui parlent d'importer des pays africains voisins, importer du bois pour remplacer ou compléter la bagasse. Là aussi, il faut donner le maximum d'information y compris rendre public le rapport de la Banque mondiale.

Touristes, industrie sucrière, *big problem!* Touristes, industrie sucrière, des défis terribles à relever. Concernant *off-shore*, tout le monde se bat, tous les patriotes, ou plus ou moins patriotes se battent pour qu'on sorte de la liste noire de l'Union européenne et du *Financial Action Task Force* (FATF), sa liste grise. Les choses tardent. Dans l'intervalle, on est en train de perdre de plus en plus au profit de Singapour, notre place vers l'Inde. Il faut ne pas perdre de temps mais, il y a des ambassades ici. On parle de *money laundering* ? La corruption est arrivée à l'île Maurice. La drogue, les liens entre la drogue et le *money laundering*. Les courses, ce que la GRA est devenue. Mais les ambassades suivent ça, les ambassades savent ce qui se passent. Grandes intentions oui, mais dans la pratique ? *L'ICAC* ? Non, le gouvernement croit que les ambassades ne suivent pas, ne savent pas que l'*ICAC*, un *rubber stamp*, un *corrupt machine*. C'est comme ça qu'on va sortir de la liste grise et noire ? Financial Services Commission, moins grave que l'*ICAC* mais ça n'existe quasiment pas là où on est arrivé.

Et, le rapport de l'audit, ils savent lire les ambassadeurs, les ambassades, le rapport de l'audit sur la corruption. Et ça aussi, c'est lié au *money laundering*, corruption à l'occasion de la COVID-19. Mon collègue a cité les passages du rapport du Directeur de l'Audit, mais c'est carrément effrayant. Des milliards ont été payés sur le dos des victimes de la COVID-19. Il faut que ça arrête tout ça, sinon on ne va jamais sortir de la liste noire et de la liste grise. Mais, en passant, je salue le courage du Directeur de l'Audit. Je salue son courage. Moi, j'ai été une fois ici, je ne citerai pas de nom. Je félicite le Directeur de l'Audit, je salue son courage et je lui dis merci aussi. Mais, je disais, ici, moi j'ai été témoin d'une scène à un moment, une vingtaine d'années, une trentaine d'années où il y avait un Directeur de l'Audit qui faisait son travail et il était menacé. Un *senior Minister* que je connaissais bien...

An hon. Member: Travailliste!

Mr Bérenger: *Ki Travailliste, twa tou kouler to inn ete twa foutou !*

(*Interruptions*)

Caméléon. Mais...

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Ganoo: Colon !

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no!

Mr Bérenger: Raciste!

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! I regulate...

(*Interruptions*)

I regulate the conduct in this Chamber. Hon. Joanna Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Dir li mette so masque.*

(*Interruptions*)

So sofer en karantenn, li pa inn met so mask bien.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Joanna Bérenger! Hon. Joanna Bérenger, do you want to take a walk outside?

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I regulate the conduct in the House. Let me, first of all, ‘caméléon’ to the address of hon. Minister Ganoo be withdrawn unconditionally.

Mr Bérenger: I withdraw, but ‘colon’ is *raciste*!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

(*Interruptions*)

Let me do my job! Hon. Minister, ‘colon’ to the address of hon. Bérenger to be withdrawn.

Mr Ganoo: If he withdraws, I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: No. No. No. I am regulating. Withdraw! I am doing my job. Withdraw unconditionally!

Mr Ganoo: If he has withdrawn, I will withdraw it.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, he has.

Mr Ganoo: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: And, I require order in this House from both sides. Please continue, hon. Bérenger!

Mr Bérenger: Yes, but you realise that he provoked me. He started it.

(*Interruptions*)

The Deputy Speaker: Nobody is going there at one o'clock in the morning. Please get on with the Budget debate.

Mr Bérenger: Donc, M. le président, j'ai dit ce que j'avais à dire sur *l'offshore*, qui est déjà et qui deviendra comme le secteur ICT, un secteur vital mais il faut faire le nécessaire concernant la corruption, le *money laundering*, les institutions qui ne font pas leur travail. Je passe à un sujet que peu de personnes ont été au fond des choses.

Le thon, la mise en conserve du thon, c'est plus de 5,000 emplois ça. C'est quelque chose que nous avons commencé au gouvernement mais c'est terriblement menacé. Là, on arrive dans quelques années, la pêche au thon dans l'océan indien va s'écrouler si ça continue. Ce n'est pas une exagération. Vraiment, on a vu ça dans d'autres régions du monde où le thon, je parle bien de thon commercial, les *purse seiners* qui ramassent 300 tonnes de thon d'un seul coup. Le thon commercial dans pas mal de régions du monde a été surexploité, a disparu. C'est ce qui risque d'arriver ici et je le redis, c'est plus de 5000 emplois, avec tout ce qu'il y a autour.

Je ne sais pas combien parmi nous suivent les réunions du *Indian Ocean Tuna Commission*. Ils viennent de se réunir là, au Seychelles, enfin, par vidéo-conférence. Mais là, la semaine dernière, un petit peu de progrès mais pas grand chose. Et nous allons vers la fin de la pêche au thon dans l'Océan Indien dans quelques années si les pays en question, tous les pays autour et dans l'océan indien seront dans cet *Indian Ocean Tuna Commission*. Il faut coordonner notre action, diplomatique et politique, avec les pays concernés, avant tout, les Seychelles, les Maldives, Sri Lanka, trois îles dans notre région mais aussi des grands pays comme l'Inde, l'Afrique du Sud, Madagascar, l'Iran dans cette commission parce que l'Océan Indien rentre jusqu'au Golfe. Il faut agir et il y a un précédent, dans le pacifique qui avait huit petits pays qui sont en train d'être pillés par les grands pays, par les grandes puissances.

Ils se sont mis ensemble, ils ont réussi quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Je ne connais pas d'autres succès en termes de coopération régionale que ce qui s'est passé mais il faut prendre exemple, il faut apprendre, il faut partager.

À cette conférence de *l'Indian Ocean Tuna Commission* dont je viens de parler, division complet! On a obtenu un petit progrès en terme de diminuer les prises, mais 5 parmi les pays les plus importants, y compris l'Inde, l'Iran, si nous ne voudrons pas l'Indonésie, ils sont venus dire –

« Non, on ne va pas diminuer nos prises pour les bateaux en bois jusqu'à 25mètres. Ça risque de tout faire foirer. »

Donc, moi, je demande qu'on prenne bien sur l'exemple des Maldives. Nous savons que les Maldives ont voté contre nous dans l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies, très regrettable mais heureusement, d'après mes renseignements, là quand il y a eu une élection pour présider l'assemblée générale des Nations unies, 15 jours de cela, les Maldives allaient l'emporter, mais un candidat venu de l'Afghanistan avec l'aide du Pakistan et de la Turquie, est venu poser sa candidature. Les Maldives ont gagné et selon mes renseignements, avec raison, l'île Maurice a voté pour les Maldives.

Maintenant il faut continuer à aller plus loin dans cette voie et c'est en faisant des choses pareil; collaborer de la façon suivante qu'on fera les Maldives évoluer sur le dossier Chagos. C'est urgent, M. le président, parce que je redis, la pêche au thon est directement menacée et risque de disparaître comme ça s'est passé dans d'autres régions du monde dans les quelques années à venir si tous les pays autour et dans l'océan Indien ne se mette pas ensemble et ce qui est triste dans ce problème-là, c'est que l'Union européenne joue un vilain rôle. Très vilain rôle surtout l'Espagne et la France. Les plus difficiles et ils sont membres, et ça aussi il faut que l'île Maurice le sache qu'on est en train de demander d'expulser la Grande-Bretagne parce que ce n'est pas un pays riverain.

Vrai, mais *foutour* faites votre travail d'après les règlements! Excusez-moi. D'après les règlements, n'importe quel pays a le droit d'être membre, à raison ou à tort, mais n'importe quel pays a le droit d'être membre s'il est un pays riverain, c'est que la Grande-Bretagne clairement n'est pas, mais aussi si le pays en question pêche dans l'Océan Indien.

Je l'ai déjà dit *we must pick the right fight* avec la Grande-Bretagne. Il ne faut aller se battre pour perdre. Ça vient de se passer il y a 3 mois, quand il a fallu élire le procureur. Il a fallu élire le procureur de la Cour pénale internationale, les anglais ont un candidat. Le Kenya marche avec les anglais avec d'autres et finalement il a été élu mais, l'île Maurice a *tire latet*, comme on dit, pour mener campagne activement contre cette candidature britannique, avec raison quand on pense à ce que la Grande Bretagne a fait et continue de faire concernant les Chagos. Mais *pick the right fight, do not pick fights that we are going to lose*. Là je le redis, je le dis à nouveau, dans le cas de *l'Indian Ocean Tuna Commission*, voyez bien les règlements, réfléchissez bien avant de *pick the wrong fight*.

Cette question du thon, je ne sais pas combien de gens réalisent que tout le thon que nous mettons en boites, ces 5,000 emplois là, tout le thon que nous mettons en boîte est importé. Malheureusement le thon n'a pas un amour particulier pour nous. Le thon circule dans l'Océan Indien; Maldives, Tanzanie, Sri Lanka, Chagos mais ils ne viennent pas en quantité commerciale dans notre zone économique! Tout cela nous l'importons et l'île Maurice est dans une situation délicate, nous sommes un pays riverain, nous avons une industrie de conserverie de thon, nous importons tout notre thon et nos conserveries ont comme actionnaires, jusqu'aujourd'hui je n'ai pas réussi à savoir le *shareholding* de ces compagnies-là.

Jusqu'aujourd'hui, l'Union européenne, qui fait beaucoup de dégâts dans *l'Indian Ocean Tuna Commission*, est actionnaire. Les mauriciens et l'Union européenne, des compagnies européennes sont actionnaires ensemble dans ces conserveries-là. Donc, c'est un sujet bien difficile mais *met latet ensam papa!* Sinon c'est toute une industrie de conserverie qui va disparaître dans les années à venir.

Je vais terminer, M. le président, sur ce qui me tracasse le plus. Le danger d'un deuxième *downgrading* par *Moody's* est malheureusement réel. Et si *Moody's* nous *downgrade* encore une fois, ça aura un effet terrible sur les banques. Les banques aussi vont être *downgraded* et un effet encore plus terrible à un impact désastreux sur notre *offshore*, sur les *global business companies* dans notre secteur *offshore*.

Ça peut déboucher sur une catastrophe, ce danger d'un deuxième *downgrading* malheureusement est réel mais allons essayer d'apprendre des autres, je prends l'exemple parce que nous devons tous espérer qu'un deuxième *downgrading* n'aura pas lieu mais nous devons mettre toutes les chances de notre côté et ce n'est pas ce qu'on est en train de faire.

Allons prendre l'exemple des Seychelles, nos voisins. Les Seychelles ont été *downgraded* en décembre par *Fitch*, l'équivalent de *Moody's*. *Downgraded* en décembre, ils étaient hantés par l'idée qu'ils pourraient subir un deuxième *downgrading*. Donc, ils ont pris des mesures, ils ont assainis les finances publiques, il n'y a pas eu de deuxième *downgrading*, au contraire, ils sont maintenant en discussion avec la Banque mondiale et le FMI pour obtenir des prêts très avantageux. Les choses ont bien changé, ce n'est pas nécessaire pour nous de faire tout ce que le FMI, tout ce que la Banque mondiale, il faut *pick and choose* mais beaucoup de ce que disent le FMI et la Banque mondiale, il faut le faire et aujourd'hui

donc les Seychelles sont en négociation avec le FMI et la Banque mondiale pour obtenir de l'argent au lieu d'être à nouveau *downgraded*.

Je répète, je ne dis pas qu'il faut faire tout ce qu'ils disent mais il y a certaines choses qu'ils disent qu'il faut faire. Je prends quelques exemples. Ce qu'on a fait et ce qu'on risque de continuer de faire avec la banque de Maurice, qui n'est plus une banque centrale, comme le dise le FMI la Banque mondiale. Il faut corriger le dire.

Le MIC, le *Mauritius Investment Corporation*, le FMI et la Banque mondiale ont demandé que la banque centrale de Maurice n'ait rien à voir avec et que le *MIC*, si le gouvernement le veut, soit financé à travers le budget, nous, on fait exactement le contraire. Les 28 milliards, le FMI et la Banque mondiale ne sont pas d'accord du tout avec la façon de faire de l'île Maurice sur cette question des 28 milliards. Les *special funds*! La Banque Mondiale et le FMI ont condamné nommément l'utilisation des *special funds* comme c'est fait ces jours-ci. Et là, ils vont noter ce qui se passe du côté du *CEB*, de la *Mauritius Ports Authority* ; mais surtout, ce que le FMI et la Banque mondiale vont bien examiner, c'est qu'est-ce qui va se passer concernant le déficit budgétaire et la dette publique. S'ils estiment que le gouvernement fait le contraire de ce qu'il faut faire ou ne fait pas assez, vous faites mal, on va avoir un deuxième *downgrading* qui serait catastrophique. Il faut faire tout ce qu'on peut faire. Je ne dis pas de ramper devant le FMI et la Banque mondiale, je ne demande pas de faire tout ce qu'ils demandent, il faut trier, mais il faut empêcher avant tout un deuxième *downgrading* par Moody's. Moody's va regarder ce que le FMI et la Banque mondiale disent sur le budget qui vient d'être présenté et les *estimates*. Il faut tout faire pour qu'il n'y ait pas un deuxième *downgrading* avec les effets catastrophiques. Le danger, et je terminerai là-dessus, M. le président, est un deuxième *downgrading* malheureusement, je dis bien malheureusement, est bien réel. Et, avec ce budget-là, avec ce qui est en train de se passer du côté de la Banque centrale, le gouvernement, dans ce contexte-là, avec la menace d'un deuxième *downgrading*, je suis obligé de dire que le gouvernement est en train de jouer avec le feu.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

An hon. Member: Shame on you!

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Who wants to stay longer?

An hon. Member: C'est la vérité ! *Ti cav fini tou zordi !*

An hon. Member: Tellement démocratique!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Uttem, would you allow me to complete the business of the House? Thank you very much! Very kind of you! I put the question!

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Monday 21 June at 11.30 a.m.

Mr Ganoo seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment matters? Thank you very much. Have a good night!

At 1.04 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Monday 21 June 2021 at 11.30 a.m.